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THE ROUGH RIDERS; or, SHARP EYE, THE SEMINOLE SCOURGE.

A TALE OF THE CHAPARRAL.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM"—Major Sam S. Hall,

AUTHOR OF "DIAMOND DICK," "THE LONE STAR GAMBLER," "THE TERRIBLE TONKAWAY," "KIT CARSON, JR.," "BIG FOOT WALLACE," ETC.



THEN WITH VENGEFUL YELLS, THE RANGERS SPRUNG UPON THEIR HORSES, AND WITH COLONEL FORD IN THE LEAD, DASHED FROM THE TOWN.

The Rough Riders;

OR,

Sharp Eye, the Seminole Scourge.

A Tale of the Chaparral.

BY BUCKSKIN SAM,

(MAJ. SAM S. HALL.)

AUTHOR OF "MERCILESS MART," "THE TERRIBLE TRIO," "ROCKY MOUNTAIN AL," "BIG FOOT WALLACE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCOUT OF THE RIO GRANDE.

COMPARED with its surroundings, Resaca de la Palma is indeed an earthly paradise.

As welcome as the oasis in the desert to the weary, thirsty traveler, are the cool shades and the waters beneath them, to these coming from the Palo Alto prairie, or from over the arid, sandy, and parched plains which lie to the north and west of Arroyo, Colorado.

Resaca de la Palma is a chain of little lakes, with but a sluggish current, and is some six miles from Brownsville, Texas; which town is twenty-eight miles from the mouth of the Rio Grande. Fort Brown is situated on a peninsula formed by a deep lagoon of black water from the river; and is half a mile below the town, government buildings, and parade grounds.

One cannot imagine denser or darker shades than are to be found, here and there, along either side of the Resaca; the fan-palm, in some places shutting out entirely the blazing noontide sun, while its own graceful foliage is shaded by tall trees of many varieties—the thorny undergrowth throughout the wide bottom being impassable, except by wagon-trails and cattle-paths, which, however, are quite numerous; for the Resaca has been an extensive camping-place as far back as the Mexican war, when the soldiers of Santa Ana made their stand within these chaparrals after their defeat by the Americans on the field of Palo Alto, where the brave Major Ringold met his death from a shell fired by the Mexicans from one of the guns of a battery that was concealed among the dense mesquites.

During the Cortina war, many a bloody battle between the Texan Rangers and the bandits of the Bravo, was fought within the shades of the Resaca, and the chaparrals that intervene between them and the Rio Grande.

At no time, however, were the followers of Juan N. Cortina so daring, bold, and successful as in the first year of the Civil War, when nearly all the fighting men of Texas were either at the front, or marching to Virginia.

At this time the Southern and Western frontiers were at the mercy of the Indians and Mexican bandits. These were beaten back, and held in check by a small force of rangers, who were obliged to fly like the wind from one point to another; at times being in the saddle both night and day.

Such a warfare necessitated the service of many scouts, whose daring deeds would fill volumes; in fact, thousands of lives were lost during the Civil War, and hundreds of most desperate battles were fought, of which nothing was known by the general public. The thunders of intestine strife on the Potomac chained all attention to that quarter, and none gave a thought to the peril of the people on the South-western border.

When the Southern ports were blockaded, the cotton raised in Texas was to a great extent, transported by ox and mule-trains to Brownsville on the Rio Grande. Thence it was crossed into Matamoras, Texas, and thence down to the mouth of the Rio Grande, where it was sold to English shippers, or exchanged for the supplies that had been cut off by the blockade.

The English ships lay at anchor in Mexican waters, within half a cannon shot of the American ships-of-war and gun-boats which formed the blockade.

The Confederate Government purchased cotton, and transported it by the same route; shipping the staple to England and France, in exchange for arms and munitions of war, as well as for shoes and clothing.

As all trains, large or small, Government or citizen, were forced to encamp, after the long trip over the desert-like plains that stretch from Banquetta Creek to Arroyo, Colorado, at Resaca de la Palma, and also when leaving Brownsville on their return, it will readily be seen that the shades of Resaca promised rich booty to the Mexican bandits, not only within a short distance of the Rio Grande, but where a thousand and one coverts afforded secure places for ambush.

And not long was it after the opening of trade with foreign countries, when the bush-whacking warfare was inaugurated by the followers of the most daring and bloodthirsty bandit America has ever known—the noted Cortina, who at one time had under his command over a

thousand cut-throats of the most desperate and merciless character; *ladrones*, escaped *peons*, and fugitives from justice—in short, the scum of Mexico.

However, generally speaking, no wagons or trains were molested until the return to Resaca from Brownsville; for the very good reason that the bandits could do nothing with the bales of cotton. But when that was disposed of the outlaws well knew that the citizens carried when returning valuable supplies and money in plenty, consequently it was then that danger and death filled the chaparrals and especially the shades of Resaca de la Palma.

The absence of middle-aged and young men—they being in the army—forced the aged, the young lads and even the women to become drivers of oxen and mules on these trips, no slaves being risked on such occasions, for fear of the negroes escaping into Mexico.

The sun, after blazing down upon the earth all day from a brazen and cloudless sky, was just sinking as two wagons, to each of which were hitched six mules, advanced slowly over the plain from the north toward the inviting coolness of Resaca de la Palma.

The mules, up to this time walking listlessly, with drooping heads and half-closed eyes, now pricked their ears forward, tossed up their heads as they scented water, and opened wide their eyes, staring forward with eager gaze, some shooting out that peculiar squeal that sounds afar and can only be given by a mule or burro.

In the rear and concealed from view by the hindmost wagon and its load of cotton-bales, was a "Dearborn," drawn by two mules.

All the animals were covered with dust and reeking with sweat wherever the harness rubbed their hides; the topmost cotton-bales also being thick with dust. All this indicated a long and tedious drive over the plains upon that well-worn wagon-road and beneath the hot sun.

The foremost wagon was driven by a man apparently about sixty years of age, with long gray hair and beard. His form was slightly bent, as he sat the saddle of one of the "wheelers," and twitched the single rein nervously, gazing ahead with evident relief at the timber they were approaching.

He was attired in a blue woolen shirt, with wide collar, homespun butternut dyed breeches which were thrust into the tops of cow-hide, and he wore upon his head a wide-brimmed black felt hat—a costume which at that time might have been seen upon the most wealthy planter in the Lone Star State.

About the waist of the old man were buckled a pair of Colt's army revolvers and a bowie-knife; arms which every man felt were indispensable even in his own home at the time of which we write.

Although well up in years, the eyes of this man were keen and piercing, his form denoting uncommon strength and his nervous actions as he cracked his "black-snake," great activity. That he was an honest man and a good man, no physiognomist would doubt, after once looking into his blue eyes and pleasant winning face.

The other wagon was driven by a mere youth, certainly not more than fifteen years of age, who was attired exactly as was the old man, and with arms of a smaller caliber. His features were decidedly feminine in their cast; his eyes being light-blue, his hair long, curly and flaxen, his nose Grecian, and his mouth small, but indicating firmness and self-reliance. The limbs and frame of the boy were evidently much benumbed by the protracted ride.

With loud outcries to the mules, speaking to them by name, as though the animals understood and could rejoice with him at the prospect of a cool camp and water, on he went.

And now the Dearborn—but we hesitate to describe the occupant of this, the last vehicle.

But here goes for a feeble description.

Perhaps the reader has judged from our words that the last of our friends is far from being *least*, and a female at that. If so, he is right. She who holds the reins and leans languidly back in her seat is a maiden fair indeed to look upon; indeed, it might be said, angelic, although attired in the commonest and simplest of costumes.

A dress of mixed black and gray homespun, neat-fitting, the skirt extending half-way between the knees and the tops of her gaiters, showing stockings of dark blue.

A dark-blue *jaquet* with two rows of steel buttons, and a straw hat bound with ribbon of the same shade as the *jaquet*, these, with gray gloves upon her small hands, completed the girl's costume.

But her face—the childish face of one who had not seen more than sixteen summers—is most beautiful. Fair, but slightly tanned, her cheeks rosy, her hair long and hanging free and in abundance, of a deep, rich gold in color. Her eyes are of a changing blue, large and lustrous, her forehead high, nose straight and Grecian, her mouth so rare and sweet that no words can do it justice.

Notwithstanding her position and location, we should say that before she braved the scorching sun of the plains, her complexion was unmistakably of that patrician bloom that rivaled the

bursting bud of a blush-rose. A silver-mounted revolver of small caliber, and a dagger partly hidden from view, are secured by a stamped belt with an ornamented clasp.

That this maiden was a lady born, if not by education and surroundings, the merest casual observer could hardly fail to decide, and the latitude in which she is introduced proves her to be either free from fear of personal danger or timidity, or else ignorant of the perils of the Mexican border.

But a short distance intervened between the wagons and the green shades, when a horseman, riding at headlong speed, came dashing over the plain on the wagon-trail toward them, passing the Dearborn, where he for a moment checked his horse and gazed in evident surprise and admiration into the face of the fair driver; but instantly realizing his rudeness, he raised his sombrero in polite salutation to the maiden, and hastened on parallel to the trail, and just clear of the teams.

A smile and a slight nod from the fair girl were returned in recognition of the salutation of the rider, this being customary with all travelers in the far South.

From the glance of eye, and expression of the young lady's countenance, it was evident that she was not a little impressed by the appearance of the stranger; and, indeed, well she might be, for he was a fine specimen of the young Texan—a perfect Apollo in form and face.

Of symmetrical build, with not an ounce of superfluous flesh, or too little for his height, his grace and suppleness, brought into play by the prancing of his half-wild mustang, man and horse made up a picture to command attention and admiration.

His jaunty Mexican buckskin costume showed off his fine form to advantage. It was richly embroidered on the sleeves and back in many colored silks, while a soft black sombrero, also of Mexican make, was worn loosely thrust back upon his head, the right side of the brim being looped up by a skull and cross-bones in silver. This was a grim and suggestive ornament, worn by the Rio Grande Rangers during the bloody Cortina war, when no quarter was asked or given on either side.

A brace of Colt's army revolvers and a bowie were strapped about his waist by a richly-embossed belt, the clasp being large and square, and of silver, with a five-pointed star cut deep upon it.

His breeches were thrust into high top-boots, of finer manufacture than was commonly seen, and upon the heels were buckled a pair of silver spurs.

Long dark-brown wavy hair hung from beneath his sombrero, over his broad, symmetrical shoulders.

His eyes were blue, bright and piercing, his face handsome, his features regular, but bronzed from exposure.

A slight mustache ornamented his lip, and his chin hinted at strength of will; while reckless daring was indicated by glance of eye and every movement, as he sat his steed like a Centaur, and then shot from the vicinity of the maiden like a flash, giving a graceful wave of his hand in salutation to the boy driver, and then again jerking his horse to a halt as he reached the side of the old man. To him, the horseman called out, cheerily:

"How d'ye, my friend? You are bound for Brownsville, I judge?"

"How do you do, stranger?" returned the old man. "Yes, I am on my way to Brownsville, and right glad I am that the journey is near an end. Had I known of the long stretch of desolate plain, and the absence of water and grass between here and Banquetta Creek, I should have hesitated about coming; at least, I should have insisted upon my daughter's remaining in Oakville."

"You would have shown good judgment, had you done so," said the stranger. "There are great dangers on the Rio Grande, to which in comparison, thirst and privation are as nothing. May I ask your name? I am known as Bill Mann, a Rio Grande scout, and at present attached to Colonel John Ford's Rangers."

"I am glad to meet you, Bill; for I have heard much of you during the troubles between the Mexican bandits and us Texans. My name is Gaines. I am commonly called 'Cap Gaines.' My little son, Gerald Gaines, is driving the other team. The boys call him 'Little Lightning,' from his quick motions, and dexterity with the lasso."

"My daughter—or, I will tell the truth, my adopted daughter—Grace Gaines, called 'Goldie,' from her hair, is driving the Dearborn. She is an angel. I am proud of her, and am much worried in regard to her accompanying us; but my wife is dead, and Goldie did not want to remain at home alone. I hope there is no danger here, in the vicinity of Fort Brown?"

The question was asked in an anxious manner.

"Not until you are on your return trip," was the reply. "Then there is great danger; but I will endeavor to see you through all right. Excuse me, but I have important dispatches for

Colonel Ford. Thanks for your confidence! I'll see you and yours in Brownsville. So long!"

"Good-by, and many thanks!"

Thus called out Cap Gaines, as Bill Mann dashed onward, soon disappearing from view in the dense shades of Resaca de la Palma; where in a little time, our friends were pleasantly encamped in a cool nook by the water's edge.

CHAPTER II.

THE DOOM OF THE SPY.

ABOUT an hour after Bill Mann had dashed from the wagons of Captain Gaines, the noted Rio Grande scout galloped into the Plaza at Brownsville, and hitching his panting mustang to a post on the west side of the square, sprung into the bar of Pete Collins, the genial and warm hearted host of an unpretending hotel and restaurant, universally known among scouts, rangers, teamsters, and soldiers of the lower Rio Grande.

It was now dark, but the bar-room was brightly illuminated, and quite a crowd of rangers and scouts were congregated there, exchanging news from all points of the chaparrals; Pete Collins being a general rendezvous. A chorus of welcome outcries and ejaculations of greeting burst from all, as Bill Mann stepped up to the bar, with a hearty:

"How d'ye, boys?"

"Dog-gone ef I ain't 'bout salerwated wi' rure glad ter friz my peepers onto yer ag'in, Bill!"

Thus yelled Old Rocky, a small, wiry frontiersman, and one of the most celebrated scouts of the great southwest.

Armed with the inevitable bowie and revolvers, clothed in buckskin breeches and a blue woolen shirt, an old black sombrero smashed down over his long gray-sprinkled hair, his face weazen and wrinkled, besides being browned by smoke of camp-fires and southern sun to the color of leather—this diminutive old scout presented a perfect picture of the old-time-bordermen; his movements being quick and nervous, his frame all bone and muscle, and his hearty shake causing Bill Mann to cringe and cry out:

"Let up, Old Rock! Yer paws are es full o' vim es a alligator's jaws. Whar's Old Rip?"

Bill Mann, invariably, when with his prairie and chaparral pards, spoke as they did.

"Here, I am, Bill, and glad to see you," said a tall, raw-boned man, with piercing eyes, as he strode to the side of the late arrival and grasped his hand.

This man's hair was mingled with gray, and his costume and manner showed the true borderman; indeed he was none other than Colonel John Ford, commonly called "Old Rip Ford"—he being the hero of the Cortina War, and of a hundred fierce battles with the Indians of Western and Northwestern Texas.

"I'm mighty pleased to run ag'in' yer, Cur-nil," said Bill, presenting a letter; "I am just from Cap Donaldson's camp, by ther north trail, an' I reckon yer'll find thet thar's biz fer ther boys up thet-a-way."

The colonel tore open the letter, quickly saying:

"Set 'em out fer ther boys, Pete! Gents, excuse me for a moment, please."

Stepping to one side of the room, beneath a candle, which was placed in a tin sconce on the wall, Colonel Ford proceeded to read the dispatch.

Pete Collins "set 'em up," and all ranged themselves along the bar, pouring out their liquor. They then awaited for their commander.

Suddenly the captain waved the letter over his head and yelled:

"Good news, boys! Captain Donaldson has cut off a crowd of the yaller hellyuns from the ford at Reynosa, and he wants help. His boys are scattered up-river; but let's drink, and then I'll read the letter to you in the dining-room. Straight whisky, Pete!"

Pouring out his liquor, the colonel raised his glass, with a smile to all hands, as the scouts and rangers followed suit, saying:

"Boys, here's hoping some of us will have the pleasure of pulling a lariat tight around Cortina's neck before another week!"

"We'll choke ther cuss offen this yearth!"

"We'll salerwate ther yaller coyote!"

"We'll take him in outen ther wet!"

"He's got ter be downed, jist es sure es this drink!"

"We'll slide him over a limb, et ther eend o' a greased rope, an' let him swing in ther evenin' breeze."

Such were the cries that rung out here and there, as all were raising their glasses to their lips.

"He's a lightnin'-bug," said Old Rocky, "an' he's flashed his wings purty often, but we-uns 'll wipe him offen this hyer big ball o' dirt. We'll tar out his tail feathers so he won't soar so much arter this moon, er I'm a perrarer perergrinatin' perravicator. I'm chippin' in blue whistlers

* Colonel Ford is yet living (1883)—was lately a frontier member of the Texas Legislature, and is now Superintendent of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum in Austin, the capital of the Lone Star State.

hefty from this on in ther game wi' ther yaller-bellies—cuss my cats ef I ain't!"

A rousing cheer from all present hailed Old Rocky's words. Then they drank their whisky, the colonel glancing around the room and scrutinizing the crowd, after which he invited them all to accompany him to the dining-room.

Had either of the scouts passed to the outside door which led into the plaza, they would have discovered a low-browed, fiendish-looking Mexican crouched at the same, listening intently to all that was said within, his *ouchillo* clutched tightly to defend himself if discovered. After the company had left the bar-room, the spy glided around the building in the darkness, crouching beneath a window, awaiting, however, until a scout had leaned out from the same and pronounced all clear of interlopers or enemies.

Opening the letter again, the colonel said:

"Here it is, boys! I'll give it to you, word for word:

"CAMP ROSITA.

"To COL. JOHN FORD, Commanding Texas Rangers on the Lower Rio Grande. Head-quarters, Fort Brown.

"DEAR COLONEL:—

"I have cut off about sixty of the Greasers from their retreat across the river, but I have lost about twenty men, all told. My other boys are off on scouts in different directions. I am entrenched in a crooked gully below Reynosa, cutting off the bandits from the ford—the Greasers being prevented by the chaparral from passing my station—but I am liable to be attacked in the rear.

"Send reinforcements at once, for while I write a scout reports another large force further down the river, but approaching my position. Bill Mann is the one to run this through to you and give necessary points.

"Give him a chance to rest, for he has been in the saddle day and night, nearly all the time, for a week.

"JOHN DONALDSON,

"Commanding Texas Rangers."

As Colonel Ford ceased reading a loud murmur of intense, exultant satisfaction filled the room.

"No time to lose, boys," exclaimed the colonel, hastily thrusting the dispatch into his pocket.

"Jim Forbush, how many men have we encamped above the ferry?"

"Fifteen, colonel," replied the young ranger addressed.

"Then we can muster about thirty men here," said Ford. "Old Rocky, you, Bill Mann and four of your picked pards, scatter on the scout between here and the Resaca, up-stream, and look out for any squad of Greasers!"

"Old Rocky and Bill can take the lower station along the wagon-trail, and in case of the Wolf of the Chaparral crossing to interfere with the wagon train camps, send word up-stream in hot haste.

"All ready for a night dash, boys! Mount and away are the words. We have them between two fires!"

This was spoken by the colonel in a hurried manner, and, as he ceased, all made a move toward the door leading into the bar, when a loud crash of glass brought every one to a halt in astonishment. This was increased as a long knife flew across the room, the blade becoming imbedded in the wall.

Colonel Ford shouted immediately:

"To horse, and scour the streets and plaza! A spy has been under the window, and our plans are known. Bring every suspicious Greaser you can lay hands on to me in the plaza!"

Then followed a rush through the bar, and after a clattering of hoofs in all directions; Pete Collins ran into the dining-room to learn the cause of the tumult.

"Pete," said the colonel, "look at this, will you! Those cussed Greasers are getting bolder every day!"

"Dog'd ef they ain't cur-nil! I expect they'll burn me out here yet. What's that you got?"

"This knife was thrown through the window, and here is a paper attached to the handle."

Cutting the string, the colonel read aloud:

"Viva el Cortina!"

"Just es I expected," said Pete. "If you an' ther boys hes bin readin' that dispatch, an' plannin', everythin' is known ter that spy, an' ef he isn't caught, you'll get ambushed, an' ther Greasers up-stream'll be warned."

"When they ambush my crowd," replied Colonel Ford, "I am ready to die! You'll see that we'll surprise their camp before daylight—spy or no spy!"

Thus speaking, Colonel Ford rushed out on the plaza, and jerking loose the neck-ropes of his horse from a post, coiled it, and made it fast to his saddle-horn. He then mounted quickly, and whirled his steed about, just as a dozen scouts and rangers galloped with exultant yells into the plaza, dragging with them, at a bounding run, a Mexican, with a lasso about his neck, and his arms also secured.

The face of the Greaser was ghastly, his eyes were protruding in terror; for well he knew that mercy to him was unthought of by his captors—that a horrible death would soon be his.

"Hyers the dog-gasted greasy, mangy yaller son of a kiote, cur-nil!" yelled Old Rocky.

"We-uns kerral'd him, though he war kickin' dirt speedy fer ther bush, an' his critter. Whoop-er-up, yer dang'd or'nary pepper-eatin' back-sticker! We-uns'll send yer ter Tophet on ther whiz!"

A yell of fury burst from the party as the colonel displayed the paper that had been attached to the knife, and read out the words on the same.

"String him up lively!" ordered the colonel. "We have no time to lose!"

A wild cry from every throat caused the wretch to shiver in abject terror; but his dread of the fate that awaited him was of short duration.

The slack of the lasso was quickly cast over the cross-piece of the frame-work that supported Peter's awning, and the Mexican was jerked upward by ready hands, until the head of the writhing victim struck the frame-work.

This done, the rope was made fast, and not until then did the Texans discover that the toes of the Greaser touched the ground.

Tying a rope around the ankles of the struggling wretch, they then bent his limbs back and upward, and secured the same about his thighs, thus making the knees the lowest part of the swaying body. Then, with vengeful yells the rangers sprung upon their horses, and with Colonel Ford in the lead, dashed from the town, and through the chaparrals up the Rio Grande, Rocky, Bill Mann, and their four picked pards behind, standing by the side of the hideous corpse, that with bulging and sightless eyes, and features contorted with agony and horror, swayed, still twitching spasmodically, in the ghastly moonlight.

Five minutes later the six scouts, in pairs, proceeded in different directions through the dense chaparral that extends between Brownsville and Resaca de la Palma, Old Rocky and Bill Mann bearing each other company.

CHAPTER III.

THE DUEL IN THE CHAPARRAL.

"GEE-HOSS-IPHAT an' Jerusalem!" exclaimed Old Rocky suddenly, as he and Bill Mann allowed their animals to move slowly across Jackass prairie, on their way to Resaca de la Palma.

"What's struck yer now, pard?" asked Bill, as if awakened from a half-sleepy line of thought.

"Dog my cats, ef yer hain't hit ther bull's-eye, Bill! I war struck all of a suddint by a idee. What in thunderation did thet Greaser sling ther knife fer?"

"Hit war nothin' short o' susanside fer him ter ha' did it; an' I ain't sottin' him down es sich a puserlanimous idgit es not ter know hit. He knowed, sartain sure, thar war a tough crowd inside o' Pete's shebang, what 'ud cotch him dead sure an' sartain. Bill, I'm ready ter take my afferdavy that we-uns strung up ther wrong pepper-eater!"

"What makes yer think thet-a-ways, Ole Rock?"

"I knows ye're sharp, Bill, but ther ole man hes gut ther best o' yer; though my ole brain-box air apt ter pan out ginerwine solid sense a leetle too late.

"Doesn't yer recommender thet ther knife kim smash through ther top o' ther windy, with 'bout ther whiz o' a 'Pache arrier?"

"Yes; ye re right thar, ole pard."

"Wa-al, didn't ther blade strike ther wall on ther down slant, purty nigh ter ther floor?"

"Yes."

"Now doesn't somethin' strike yer, Bill?"

Bill Mann brought his hand down with a slap on the horn of his saddle, as he replied:

"Ole Rock, ye're solid till the last, an' wo'th a dozen lawyers! Why, we've hung the wrong Greaser! Every word ther pore cuss said war true enough; but thar's no doubt he war crooked, an' in wi' ther scum o' ther Bravo."

"Jist 'bout what I thought yer'd spoke! Why, dang my gran'marin's black cat! Ther cuss what throwed ther knife must ha' bin in thet mesquite tree abint Pete's bar, an' purty nigh ther windy. We-uns war all a passel o' blamed sap-heads, Ole Rip counted in. I'm bettin' high ther boyees 'll run right inter a nest o' yaller hellyuns, without bein' prepar'd fer bloody biz, er ther game air bu'sted!"

"Since thinkin' hit over, Ole Rock, I'm of the same opine; but hit's too late now to warn our pards. I'm incernated ter think thet ther spy-in' Greaser picked his time, when ther gerloot we-uns strung up were passin' by, ter sling ther knife; knowin' thet by sacrificin' ther cuss's life he c'u'd escape an' take his infermashe up-river.

"He skuted, without doubt, while we-uns war stringin' t'other one up."

"Thet's jist it, pard, an' ther game are spilt, dead sure. Thar won't be no Greasers ter count kerral'd by ther boyees; fer they'll scatter, arter they sends a hefty shower o' lead pills, an' I shouldn't wonder ef a heap on 'em 'ud strike down Resaca-way."

"Mebbe so; but not before ter-morrer. Things 'll be quiet 'nough ter-night, I'll warrant; an' I'm booked fer a snooze, fer I hain't g'n my peepers a rest since night 'fore last."

"Yer kin crawl inter a patch o' mesquites,

an' I'll lunge 'roun' a leetle ter see ef thar bees any o' ther yaller cut-throats in ther brush."

"Thanks, Ole Rock! For I need rest, if any man ever did. A few hours' sleep 'll do me a heap o' good. By ther way, pard, I passed two cotton-wagons an' a Dearborn jest as I come nigh ter Resaca, an' I reckon they're camped nigh ther main trail. Ther outfit belongs ter Cap. Gaines, an' he hes his son and daughter with him."

"Ther gal air jist ther prettiest female human I ever see'd done up in hum-spun. I'm on ther lookout fer ther outfit ter-morrer, an' we-uns must see 'em through O. K."

"I'm a reg'lar perpetral, back-actin', self-cocker, with solid four-hoss sense usually, Bill; but a female 'oman puts me out, 'specially a purty one, an' makes me act like a dod-rotted blind ole fool."

"What in thunderation did he want ter fotch her outen civilize fer? Hit war wuss'n foolish ter fotch ther boyee erlong!"

"I doesn't s'pose ther ole cap'n know'd any thing 'bout ther country hyer-a-ways. Thet's 'bout how I put him up, ther leetle I see'd o' him. But, Old Rock, hyar we air in thick brush; so I'll stake my nag, an' then take a snooze."

"Glide this-a-way in 'bout three or four hours an' I'll be ready fer biz. Es I'm feelin' now, I ain't woth shucks."

The two scouts, as Bill Mann spoke, entered the dense chaparral, leaving Jackass Prairie, covered with tall, wiry bunch grass, in their rear, and brightly illumined by the moon; while in the mesquites it was as dark as Erebus.

However, the horses followed a well-marked cattle-trail without guidance, and, agreeably to his words and inclination, Bill Mann made a halt, securing his horse at a point where the animal could graze upon the rank, tender grass.

With a low "So long," Old Rocky proceeded onward, and Bill crawled into the dense thicket, some little distance from his horse, and cast himself upon the earth, determined to sleep off his fatigue.

The swishing of bushes, and the tramp of the horse of Old Rocky, filled Bill's ears for a short time, and then died away; but, as he was about losing all sense of his surroundings, these sounds seemed to be revived, growing more and more noticeable, and causing him to decide that his old pard was, for some inexplicable reason, returning.

He knew that Old Rocky would not return so soon unless something was wrong; and as this fact became fastened on his drowsy brain it caused him, at first partially, and then wholly, to recover his powers of mind and to awaken.

That which struck Bill strangely was that these sounds proceeded from the east, while Old Rocky had gone toward the north.

Throwing off his semi-somnolence, the young scout sprung to his feet, regardless of the thorns which scratched his hands and face.

He distinctly heard an animal, let it be what it might, crash through the mesquites into the clear prairie that he and his old pard had but just now traversed; and at the moment that the bushes ceased swaying, a sounding report burst startlingly on the night air, followed by a piercing shriek of agony, a heavy fall, and the rumble of fast trampling hoofs through the grass.

Bill Mann bounded from the thicket and down the path, bursting clear of the mesquites.

Straight ahead for half a mile stretched the moon-illumined bunch-grass of Jackass Prairie, silent as the grave; but some fifty yards to his right, the branches of the mesquites were swaying to and fro, proving that the animal he had heard had darted to cover at that point.

Filled with the utmost amazement, the young scout jerked his revolver, and having had good proof that assassins were lurking in the chaparrals, prudently sunk to the earth and crawled along, being careful not to disturb the long blades of grass as he went.

Some length of time passed before Bill was successful in his search. Then he placed his hand forward in the bunch-grass, and instinctively recoiled, holding up his hand in the clear moonlight.

It was covered with warm blood!

Bill knew that he had placed his hand on a prostrate human being, and that he had discovered the victim of the shot and author of the startling yell.

Again he crawled forward, banishing all prudence, and brushing aside the long wire-like grass, disclosing at last the blood-stained face of a young man, who lay upon his back between the bunches of grass. To the scout's astonishment, the victim of the assassin's bullet was elegantly dressed, evidently a foreigner; and his presence in that locality at such an hour was decidedly mysterious.

From the costume of the man, Bill decided that he was an Englishman—probably one of the agents of the cotton ships at the mouth of the Rio Grande, many of whom he had seen at Brownsville. It required only an instant's inspection to decide Bill in this, and also that the stranger was only stunned by the

bullet, it having merely glanced along the skull.

But the attention of the young scout was immediately drawn elsewhere.

He was gifted with an acute sense of hearing, and a remarkably keen sight—these essential requisites in a scout having been the means of gaining him his reputation—and he detected a slight sound in the *motte* of grass that seemed to be nearing his position.

On the instant, Bill reasoned that whoever had shot the young Englishman had been lying in wait for the latter for the purpose of robbery, and not only this, but that the assassin must have observed him and Old Rocky as they crossed the prairie and proceeded toward Resaca de la Palma.

That the miscreant now feared the return of himself and his pard, alarmed and guided as they were by the report of the rifle, was plain, or he would not be now approaching his victim in so guarded and stealthy a manner, stopping at times to listen.

Not the slightest breeze now stirred the air, and consequently the least movement of the coarse rustling grass was heard by Bill, who drew his bowie, and crouched within easy springing distance of the prostrate man; bending close to the earth, and peering under the arches of grass, in order to detect the exact position of the assassin.

Not long had the young scout to wait. Indeed, the man who approached his position seemed anxious to finish his bloody work, secure his booty, and escape; all of which proved that he was aware of the proximity of the Texans.

Soon Bill discovered, in the moonlight, the buttons and slashed breeches of a crawling man, fast nearing the senseless Englishman, and he made ready for a desperate fight.

That the assassin was a Mexican, he well knew, as he caught sight of the hands, and the long knife that was clutched tightly within them.

In another instant, the head of the Greaser appeared above the grass, his snake-like eyes glancing around him suspiciously. Then he sprung forward upon the prostrate man, with his uplifted knife gleaming in the moonlight.

Lightning-like, however, was the bound of Bill Mann; and ere the *cuchillo* of the Mexican descended, scout and Greaser rolled about in the grass in desperate conflict—a conflict which must end only in death.

Down went the blade of the scout into the shoulder of the assassin at the first bound, but it glanced along the bone; than each clasped the knife hand of the other, and rolled over and over, their eyes glaring, their faces contorted with deadly hate, and their muscles drawn to the utmost tension.

Never before had Bill Mann met an opponent of such muscular strength, and the perspiration poured from his form, as he now writhed and struggled for the upper and advantageous position.

How the conflict might have ended cannot be said; but Bill was at the most critical moment in his life favored by the help of the very man for whom he was braving death.

Already was his strength giving way; long trails, privation, and want of sleep had greatly weakened the young scout. The Greaser was uppermost, hissing exultant expressions into his very face. Bill's overstrained muscles relaxed, and refused their office.

Thus it was, when the eyes of the scout were drawn from the face of his enemy for an instant, to discover the Englishman, blood-stained, ghastly, his eyes glaring wildly as he staggered forward, knife in hand; unseen by the Mexican, whose long hair, hanging down loosely, screened from his view the deadly danger that menaced him from behind.

The next moment, Bill felt a terrific weight crushing him, as the Englishman fell upon the back of the Mexican, and drove his knife to the hilt in the Greaser's body.

A horrible yell of agony broke 'from the lips of the assassin, and the young scout felt the blood flowing down upon him—felt the breath being literally crushed out of his body. Then, by a herculean effort, he cast off the great weight, and staggered to his feet.

There, on the sward, beneath the blades of bunch-grass, lay the assassin, his brutal visage drawn in the agonies of death, his form twitching convulsively; while his intended victim lay by his side, seemingly dead, still grasping the handle of his knife, the blade of which was buried in the back of the Greaser.

Panting with exertion, Bill Mann gazed down upon the strange and terrible scene; but his attention was soon drawn to the mesquites, from the midst of which galloped Old Rocky, revolver in hand, exclaiming:

"Dang my cats, Bill! What's ther rumpus? Hyer I bees, ready an' eager fer bleed! Whoop-er-ee!"

CHAPTER IV.

WHO IT WAS.

"Yer'n a leetle too late, pard," said Bill Mann, still panting from his terrible hand-to-hand struggle with the Mexican assassin.

"Ther man what war shot by ther yaller-belly kim to jist in time ter save my bacon; fer I sw'ar I never tackled onter a Greaser afore what hed es much solid bone, meat an' muscle. I air 'bout played out, es yer kin see, an' ef I hed scrouged through with any breathe an' bleed left, hit 'u'd bin by ther skin o' my teeth. Dang'd ef I ain't sot back by this biz!"

"I war nigh asleep when I heerd ther smash-in' o' brush, follered by ther shot."

"Who in thunderation air ther stranger? Be he bad hurted?"

"Ther bullet knocked his idees on a stampede, an' he hes lost a heap o' bleed; but I reckon he'll come 'roun' O. K. I opines—fac' air, I'm dead sure he's one o' ther Britishers what's hangin' 'roun' Brown arter cotton-bales."

"Ya-as, ye're kerrect, Bill; I see'd him with a half-dozen other fresh-lookin' humans et Pete's bar las' night, afore yer 'roved. I reckon, though, he's a gamey gerloot, straight up an' squar', by ther way he skipped in on ther pepper-eater."

"He went fer ther biz part o' thet Greaser's 'natermy, an' sp'iled him fer futur' devilment."

"Wash ther bleed off, an' sot him on his pins, an' he'll be a slam-up 'pearin' human, Ole Rock, I'm bettin' on thet. I owe him a life, an' I'm ther chap'rell cock what pays my debts. Thar's a sprinklin' o' Cortina's Greasers in ther mesquites, an' hit sorter puzzles me. I thought they war all up ther Grande, dead sure."

"Somethin's up what we-uns ain't tumbled ter yit," said Old Rocky, in a lower voice, as he glanced suspiciously around. "Whar in thunderation's ther hoss thet Englisher war ridin'? Thar's more o' ther yaller scum crawlin' 'roun', er I'll chaw bugs fer grub nex' six moons."

"Ther hoss stompeded inter ther bush. Jump ter dirt, Old Rock, er some on 'em mought pick yer off yer critter. Fling us yer canteen. I'll luberate ther Englisher's head an' fotch him 'roun' ter biz. This hyer thing needs 'splainin', fer ef yer see'd him in Brown las' night, he must ha' bin follered from thar."

Bill Mann gently loosened the fingers of the stranger from the knife, drew the same from the body of the dead Mexican, then wiped the blood from the weapon, and returned it to the scabbard at the belt of the senseless man. This done he poured water liberally over the stranger's head, also forcing some into his mouth, soon having the satisfaction of seeing him return to consciousness. The Englishman stared around him in intense wonder at the scouts, and then upon the hideous, blood-stained corpse by his side.

It was but for a moment. Then he sprung to his feet, his countenance showing that he recalled the near past. Grasping the canteen, he took a long draught, and then exclaimed:

"Gentlemen, my most sincere and heartfelt thanks for your timely assistance. I should undoubtedly have been a corpse ere this, but for you. That cowardly miscreant shot me from the bushes, for I caught a view of his face, and I know that it was he who was attempting your life also."

This last he said with a gesture to Bill.

"I judged," the stranger continued, "that you had gotten yourself into the scrape, by pitching into the Mexican to save me from his knife, so I made an effort to prevent his succeeding there."

"As I struck the blow my brain reeled, and I lost all consciousness. Again I must thank you most sincerely for having saved my life."

"Yer needn't sling thet sort o' gab et we-uns," exclaimed the old scout, impatiently.

"When a white human air in a tight box wi' yaller er red hellyuns, Old Rock an' his pard, Bill, stan's ready allers ter sling lead pills er cold steel. Howsomever, I warn't nigh hyer."

"Yer owes Bill all ther soft soder tongue yer feels inclernated ter sift out, an', though he air like this ole raw-hide ripper, an' sich bosh makes him hev a strong appertite ter puke. This air all humbug, though, an' we-uns must glide ter kiver."

"Ef ther Greaser hes anythin' worth confiscatin', snake hit offen him, stranger, fer he's your meat."

"Yes," said Bill Mann, "zamine ther cuss, an' 'propriate his outfit o' arms an' things."

"Excuse me, gentlemen; I would not touch the carcass on any consideration." The Englishman shuddered as he spoke, looking with loathing upon the corpse. Then he added:

"I think your advice good, my friend. Probably we are exposing ourselves to the fire of some of this Mexican's companions in crime."

As he spoke the Englishman followed Old Rocky into the mesquites, the latter leading his horse, but Bill lingered to relieve the Greaser of his arms and whatever valuables might be about his clothing. There was little, however, except a Spanish knife and a revolver.

When all were within the shades of the mesquites, they enconced themselves on the edge of the same, following the advice of Old Rocky, and peered out over Jackass Prairie.

Bill Mann saturated a handkerchief and bound it over the wounded head of the stranger, and the old scout, fumbling in his saddle-bags, produced a flask of whisky.

"Hyer, stranger," he said, "take a suck et this."

fire-water, an' hit'll put a leetle more vim inter yer 'natermy; sorter take ther place o' ther bleed yer lost. Then kinder sling us out yer story, in baby-talk, fer thar's danger in ther mesquites er I'm a boss liar. Keep yer peepers peeled, Bill; fer ef ther cuss hed pards, thet shot o' his'n let 'em know he hed biz on han'. I'm jist gittin' worked up inter hyderphobic indig', an' I'll soon hev es much vim an' cussedness es a buckin' mule, arter gittin' loose from two weeks' hobblin'. Dang ther yaller piruts! They're gittin' woss an' wosser."

"Dog-gone ef I ain't gittin' woked up too, Ole Rock," returned Bill. "I plum fergut I war so sleepy. Stranger, what's yer handle, an' how come yer in ther chap'ralls this hyer time o' night?"

"Gentlemen," said the Englishman, in a low, hurried tone, "I should have confided in you at once, even had you not requested it. My name is Prescott Stanley Percy. I am—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Old Rocky. "Thet's a altergether too 'ristocratic an' spread-eagle a cog! Hit doesn't sound nat'ral in this hyer section. We'll bitch a handle onter yer, an' see ef yer kin make hit w'ar. I'll hash up thet 'cross-ther salt-drink' name o' yourn, an' we'll christen yer Stan'-ther-Press. Hit sounds ruther 'properit'."

Bill was forced to chuckle, as the old scout pronounced the name which he had so quickly formed out of the real name of the Englishman. The latter, himself, could not withhold a laugh, as he continued:

"You can call me what you wish, my friend. Although 'stand the press' is an Americanism, I understand it perfectly, and I trust I shall not fail in making it appropriate in its literal meaning."

"Scuse me," said Bill, "but I tuck yer fer an Englisher; but since I hes heerd yer sling gab, I'm a leetle inclernated ter think I air mistaken."

"I am an Englishman, sir, but I have spent much of my life in America, in a search, which so far has been a fruitless one, for a cousin of mine. But I can not give you the story in detail now. I belong to a wealthy and titled family in England, and am heir to a large estate; but, in my judgment I am not the rightful heir."

"Some twelve years ago, my uncle, Lord Prescott Percy, with his wife and their only child, a daughter four years of age, embarked in a packet ship for a voyage in Southern seas. Lady Percy was in feeble health, and her physicians had ordered the trip. They visited Havana, and took passage in a small vessel across the Gulf of Mexico, intending to visit Galveston."

"The vessel, a brig named the Royal Prince, foundered in a storm, and all were supposed to be lost. The estates fell to my father, who has since died, leaving me sole heir; but, about a year ago, I accidentally saw, in a paper, an item stating that an old sailor had landed in Plymouth, who claimed to have been on the Royal Prince. I sought the man, and got his story in regard to the wreck."

"It seems that he and six of the crew constructed a raft, and at the time they left the side of the brig, Lord and Lady Percy, the child, the captain and two seamen put off in the long-boat, and were soon lost sight of in the heavy sea."

"He stoutly asserted that the boat had washed to land, in the vicinity of Indianola, there being no human being in the same except the little girl. This intelligence he had gained from an American sailor. The child, he said, had been saved, and adopted. I immediately sailed for America, in search of my little cousin; but about then, the Civil War opened, and I saw that I was likely to be forced into the Confederate service; so I returned to England."

"But my mind was tortured by the possibility that my cousin might be living, perhaps in poverty and ignorance; so, when the cotton trade with Mexico opened, I at once took passage for the mouth of the Rio Grande. Since my arrival, I have been engaged in purchasing cotton, and in making inquiries in regard to the lost child. The only clew I have, is that she is now about sixteen years of age, and is probably very pretty, with blue eyes and golden hair."

"Nearly every one in Brownsville knows the nature of my mission, and yesterday I received a note stating that a man who lived near the Resaca de la Palma had an adopted daughter, answering to that description. This information caused me to start as soon as I had concluded my business."

"A Mexican volunteered to guide me, but not liking his looks, I declined to engage him. I got lost in the chaparrals, and here I am. You, gentlemen, know the remainder better than I do myself."

"Hit war all a put-up job, ter take yer in outen ther wet; an' ter 'properate yer 'plata' an' critter," said the old scout. "Stan'-ther-Press, when yer wants infermashe in this section, ax fer hit, an' gaze plum' inter ther ger-loot's peepers what's givin' hit."

"Hit war a close shave, but yer made a live o' hit. Don't never 'pend on nothin' what's writ' enter paper. I couldn't never make nothin' outen a pen-trail, an' I doesn't want ter. From what yer hes spit out I knows ye're squar' an' white, er yer wouldn't bother 'bout ther leetle kaliker; 'specially when, by runnin' ag'in' her, yer'll lose wealth by it."

"Hit's a ornighy, solid an' squar' trail ye're on, an' yer orter, strike plain sign hyer in South Texas, ef anywhar, 'cordin' ter ther 'ports yer hes hed."

Bill Mann said not a word.

Ever since the Englishman had spoken in regard to a golden-haired maiden, the mind of the young scout had been filled with thoughts of the angelic girl, Goldie Gaines, whom he had passed on the prairie, before entering the shades of Resaca.

Now he recalled the fact that Cap Gaines had stated that Grace, or Goldie, was his adopted daughter.

Although this recently gained knowledge seemed to point to a favorable ending for the stranger's search, Bill resolved not to awaken hopes that might only plunge the wounded man into more dangers.

While Prescott Percy was relating his story, both Bill and Old Rocky swept the moonlit prairie with piercing gaze, and inspected the borders of the mesquites; and it was but a moment after the Englishman had ceased speaking that a hiss of caution left the lips of the old scout.

The next instant, half a dozen brutal-visaged, villainous Mexican bandits urged their horses from the mesquites into Jackass Prairie, not a pistol-shot in advance from our friends; and at the same point where Bill had seen the swaying branches, that proved to him that the horse of the Englishman had plunged into the shades at that place.

A second glance showed to the watchers that a fully equipped horse was led by the Greasers.

This animal Prescott Percy recognized as his own.

"Jerk yer shootin'-irons, an' git ready, fer lively trigger-pickin', front actin', four-hoss biz! Ther's double-distilled dagnation in ther air yer breathe, yer cussed pepper-eaters!"

"The gates o' Topbit air creakin' fer yer, an' ther devils hes a big fandang' 'specially fer yer. Yer'll soon dance lively on hot coals. Trot erlong inter a leetle nigher range, fer ther moon makes my peepers blink."

Six deadly tubes were held with tight grip, and thrust between the branches of the mesquites, as Old Rocky ceased speaking; the moon playing but an instant on the bright and polished steel, that was so soon to belch fire, and with spiteful reports send a hurtling volley of leaden messengers of death through the air.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE BANDITS.

OLD Rocky, Bill Mann, and the Englishman stood, immovable as statues, screened by the foliage of the mesquites; and the horse of the old scout seemed to realize that danger threatened, for he stood silent and motionless, as soon as the hiss of warning left his master's lips.

Our friends well knew, from the manner of the approaching Mexicans, that they apprehended no danger.

They had with them the horse of the Englishman, and this proved that their comrade had performed his part, the sound of the shot on the still night air being to them still further proof. That they expected to have seen their fellow-bandit, upon breaking free from the mesquites, was evident from their manner and wandering, searching glances; as also from their hasty and angry ejaculations, as they urged their animals forward.

Soon the horses of the leading Mexicans not only halted, but sprung backward with wild snorts of terror, thus drawing the attention of their riders to the crushed and trampled bunch-grass in front of them.

All now spurred hastily forward, with mad oaths and tight reins; but the horses, frantic from the scent of human blood, sheered off to the right and left, notwithstanding the cruelly-driven spurs.

At once the eyes of all became fastened in a glaring, horrified stare upon the blood-smeared form of their comrade, whose ghastly face and fixed, glassy eyes were rendered more horrible by the bright moonlight.

The swarthy ruffians all seemed to instantly comprehend that, in all probability, they were in a dangerous position, and exposed to a fire from the mesquites in their front, although they had no reason to suppose that more than one enemy could be present, and he the Englishman. They, however, had proof before them that he was no novice in a hand-to-hand encounter, and that he was doubtless brave and daring enough to blaze away at them, regardless of their numbers.

A moment more and a low, snake-like hiss sounded from the mesquites, causing the coward blood to chill in the veins of each Mexican; but as they pressed rein and limb to whirl their horses, an instant after the hiss, a blinding flame shot from the foliage, and a thunderous report, as each of our friends pressed trigger at the same instant.

The still night air was now filled with horrid

sounds, yells of terror and dread horror, of despair and deathly agony, and the shrill snorts of affrighted beasts, amid which came a rattling discharge of revolvers, as the three whites sprung from the mesquites.

Then followed a rush of terrified, riderless steeds through the tall grass, and the prancing and snorting of the horse of the Englishman, which was prevented from escaping from the fact that the animal to which it was fastened had been shot dead, as well as its rider, by Old Rocky. This was a prearranged plan in the mind of the old scout, to secure Percy's horse.

But one of the Mexicans escaped into the chaparral; some, desperately wounded, falling from their saddles, while their animals were at headlong gallop, and then receiving a finishing bullet from the scouts.

"Stan'-ther-Press, thar's yer nag," said Old Rocky. "Freeze onter ther critter from this on. Dang'd ef we-uns didn't hev a hefty rifle o' fun, ef hit didn't last long!"

"Thar's five—six, countin' ther one, yeou stuck—less bellyuns ter fight, up-river. Hit's not sich a dang'd pore night fer Greasers arter all, an' ye're gittin' broke in right on ther jump. Reckon yer'll stan' ther press party well ef yer keeps on."

"Bill, how does yer legs wabble? Kinder loose in ther jints an' floppy in ther eyelids, ain't yer?"

"No, Ole Rock; I've gut over thet. Hefty biz hes driv' ther sleep an' tired inter a back seat. I'm right on ther rush now."

Percy at once cut his horse loose from the saddle-horn of the dead mustang, quite overjoyed at the recovery of his animal.

"I did not for a moment," he said, "think of shooting the horse of the ruffian who had my nag in lead. You scouts are truly wonderful men, and see in an instant the slightest advantage in carrying out your plans, even during the most exciting moments. I am beginning to feel more like myself."

"Once in the saddle, I have more confidence. Tramping and tearing around among the thorny bushes and cacti is not very agreeable."

The cool unconcern and absence of all fear in the Englishman added to the favorable impression he had already created in the minds of the scouts, and the skill he had shown in the use of his revolvers gave them an agreeable surprise.

Percy sprang into his saddle, showing excellent horsemanship, as the animal, with snorts of terror, bounded over the bodies of the slain, striving to fly from the scene of the ambush.

"Reckon yeou'll do fer chap'rall-tarin' an' perrarer promernadin', Stan'-ther-Press; an' ef yer doesn't keer 'bout levantin' back Brown'-ways, yer kin glide toward Resaca with we-uns, an' streak her on ther plain wagon-road, come sun-up."

"Dang'd ef yer doesn't look es though yer hed bin through a tight scrimmage!"

The old scout and Bill now reloaded their revolvers, the former laughing in his peculiar manner as he looked at the Englishman, who was indeed in a forlorn condition.

The white handkerchief which Bill had bound about his head was saturated with blood, as was his face, and his clothing was much torn by the chaparral through which he had ridden in a bewildered condition previous to his being shot. His apparel also was soiled and blood-stained, from his encounter with the Mexican.

All in all, Percy appeared a befitting subject for a hospital; but he bore up bravely, surprisingly so, when it was considered that he had lost a large amount of blood and had so recently been engaged in such a desperate struggle for his life.

"I'm dead sure," said Bill Mann, "I can't sandwich in a snooze ther way things crop out. I perposes that we-uns all skutes Resaca-way; fer ef I ain't dang'dly mistaken, thar's a gin'-ral rush o' Greasers over ther Grande, clean from whar I lef' Cap' Donaldson down ter Brown."

"Thet's 'bout ther way I puts hit up, Bill," agreed Old Rocky, "else a hefty batch o' ther kiotes what Donaldson headed off from ther ford sneaked down this-er-way 'bout ther time yeou lef' camp. Ther cuss what wanted ter guide Stan'-ther-Press must ha' knowed 'bout what direc' he war goin' ter take. I opine thar's a big bunch on 'em sneaked down Resaca, an' split inter a dozen parties, fer ter scoop in ther leetle wagon-camps, an' ef thet's ther way o' things, I reekon Cap Gaines's outfit 'll stan' a show ter git bu'sted up, even ef they hesn't gut ther 'plata' fer the'r cotton."

Bill Mann became unusually excited and anxious at these words of Old Rocky, and urged an immediate departure toward Resaca de la Palma, while he cautioned his old pard in a low voice against revealing any particulars such as he himself had mentioned, in connection with the Gaineses, in the hearing of the Englishman.

The arms and valuables were taken from the bodies of the slain and "cached" in the thicket.

This done, all were ready for a start and Old

Rocky took the lead along a stock-path through the mesquites, the other two bringing up the rear.

They had gone in this way but a few yards when the old scout suddenly halted, giving a low whistle which caused his pards to halt also.

Half a dozen reports from fire-arms in a scattering volley sounded from afar in their front, but so faintly that none but the keenest practiced ears could have heard them.

"Ther condemned yaller hellyuns is et thar bloody biz!" yelled Old Rocky. "Spur, boyees, fer white humans is bein' butchered!"

"Rip ahead, Ole Rock!" cried out Bill, in a voice of intense anxiety and alarm. "Spur up! fer we're all needed, an' needed bad!"

The Englishman spoke not a word, but urged his horse close in the rear of the old scout, who could proceed but slowly on account of the partial darkness and the thorn-covered limbs that arched the path and tore along the sides of the riders.

The scouts, however, knew the ground, and they soon entered a path that was wider and easier to follow.

Here Old Rocky passed his flask of whisky to the Englishman, bidding him keep it, and not forget "ter take a hefty snifter now an' then ter keep his vim up."

All now listened intently, but not another sound met their ears.

With the exception of the peculiar cry of the night-bird, known as the chaparral-cock, and the short, sharp bark of a coyote, the shades were silent as death.

"Ther groun' air soft an' damp hyer," said the old scout, "an' we-uns hes gut ter perceed slow an' still, er mebbe so we'll spile our biz. Ther condemned yaller pepper-eaters hes gobbled up some camp, sure es shootin', an' thar'll be no use goin' on a rush, er we'll lose our chances."

"Come on slow an' easy, boyees, an' keep yer shooters ready ter spit lead et short notice!"

On, as directed, went the trio. Bill Mann, although tortured with anxiety, well knew that the advice of his old pard must be followed, if any good was to be accomplished by them.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BIVOUAC IN THE SHADES.

THE camping-place chosen by Captain Gaines was a most beautiful location, the many circular mounds of ashes proving it to be a favorite one.

The old man had turned his team from the main road to the right, following wheel-ruts for some two thousand yards, until he entered a small natural open which bordered on the Resaca, the water being in plain view from his position, as he could see over the reeds and rushes along the shore, amid which were narrow, clear spaces, widening here and there, as if formed by some amphibious beasts, who came on shore occasionally to eat grass or roots.

The western sky was still of a rosy hue, afar up toward the zenith, as Captain Gaines urged the mules across the open and then turned the team, in order that he might bring the rear of the wagon toward the water.

He then slid from his saddle, feeling stiff and weary, as his son, with a shout of joy, drove his team to a position near and parallel to his father's, Goldie following close, after halting the mules, and gazing with admiration upon the view.

"You just sit right here, Goldie," directed the youth, "until I get limber, and unhitch. Then I'll attend to your mules. Father, what's the difficulty? Feel stiff as the wagon-tongue, don't you?"

As he spoke, the lad ran toward the line of reeds, then whirled and turned several hand-springs, saying, as he came running back, laughing:

"Take a little circus in yours, father, as I do."

"When I was as young as you, Gerald," said the captain, "I was pretty lively myself, I admit, though probably not as lively as you are. But come; we must get the mules out of harness and start a fire for supper. I'm as hungry as a bear."

"And we must remember that it won't be prudent to keep up a blaze long after dark. Goldie, are you very tired, dear?"

"Don't mind me, father. I've had a comfortable day in comparison with what you have had. This is a lovely place to camp, and I could sit here and admire that sunset sky for an hour."

"Only you're too hungry," said Gerald. "Father talks of being as hungry as a bear. I know I'm as hungry as two bears. I believe I could eat a pair of fair-sized ones, hides included."

"Don't exaggerate so! You talk ridiculous," said the young girl, as she removed her hat and threw back her wealth of golden hair with a graceful toss.

The captain and his little son made quick work in unhitching and removing the harness from the tired mules, the animals then throwing themselves upon the cool sward and rolling back and forth, rubbing their sides and shoulders.

They were then led to the bank of the Resaca and allowed to drink moderately. Then they were secured to the wagons and fed with corn.

Then it was that Gerald proved his cognomen of "Little Lightning" to be well deserved, for he collected wood in a marvelously short time, starting a fire, and soon the fragrant aroma of coffee, and enticing scent of frying bacon filled the camp, while the youth flew about the fire like an Indian dancing around his tortured captive.

Goldie made herself useful in getting out the blankets from the Dearborn, which she placed near the fire, and then procured the necessary dishes and tin cups for the evening meal.

Suddenly Gerald grasped a piece of deadwood and sprung toward the reed-covered bank, his actions drawing the attention of his father and sister, who were amazed, not understanding what his object could possibly be. Neither spoke, however, and soon they perceived that the tall reeds were rustling in many places, indicating the presence of some living thing, they knew not what.

Little Lightning, crouching half-bent with his club grasped tight, soon disappeared in the rushes, parting them with care. Then they heard several blows quickly delivered, and to the astonishment of the watchers, hundreds of various water-fowl arose with flapping wings, and sailed up the stream in such a laborious manner as to betray their extreme fatness and consequent laziness.

Then with a shout of pride and satisfaction, the youth sprung from the rushes with a huge mallard duck in each hand, their tails dragging.

"In the name of wonder, how did you secure those ducks, my son?" asked his astonished father.

"Knocked their heads with my club. The ducks here are as careless in regard to humans as our hens and turkeys at home. I tell you, Goldie, we'll have a grand supper and breakfast."

"This is a gay old place to camp. There's sport here I tell you, father. Why, the water's full of fish and soft-shell turtles. I'm going for them early in the morning, if I don't yank a few catfish out to-night. I've got some good lines and hooks, and won't I just show you?"

"Now, Gerald, you know you're very tired, and you should get some rest," reasoned Goldie. "You can fish and hunt enough at home, I should think. This certainly is no time to tax yourself with any unnecessary labor or fatigue."

"I'm skinning this duck, sis, and listening to you; but I tell you I'm bound to see what's in the waters of Resaca de la Palma. Besides, I'm going to hunt for a shell or cannon-ball, for they say there are plenty since that big battle here, in the Mexican War, when our boys drove the Greasers back from their position in the chaparrals the day after the Palo Alto fight."

"I'm glad you remember your history so well, but I fear you know nothing of the seven years' struggle with England, and what Washington did."

"I haven't got any use for that kind of knowledge, Sis. Washington was O. K., I suppose, but he couldn't rope a mustang, I'm dead sure. He didn't know anything about Texas; and the United States didn't amount to shucks until Texas was annexed."

Captain Gaines laughed heartily, as did Goldie, as they watched the boy dissecting mallard, and placing the meat to broil over the mesquite coals.

The evening had grown darker and darker, but in a little while the moon cast down her silvery light into the little open, enabling the wearied travelers to enjoy their supper much better than had it been dark. All around them, however, the shrubbery and mesquites, the tangled, thorny thickets, and patches of palm and cacti were inky black, and suggestive of lurking foes; especially to Captain Gaines, who, since he had spoken with Bill Mann, had been much concerned in regard to their safety.

"We must be very prudent, my dears," he advised, during the meal; "for the scout who passed us would not have mentioned the probable dangers of this section, unless he had good reasons for it."

"Bill Mann is one who has a reputation for skill and bravery, and is noted for having had a great many hair-breadth escapes from death. In fact, I have heard many rangers assert that he bears a charmed life; just as Cortina seems to be protected by the evil one, for he escapes in every battle, and has been shot at by the best marksmen a hundred times."

"I'll bet that mallard against a four-year-old beef!" exclaimed Little Lightning, "that I can lasso Cortina myself! Give me half a chance, that's all. I just want to get a pop at a Greaser, before we leave the Resaca; and I don't believe if I draw bead on one, and pull trigger he'll ever kick again. I suppose Bill Mann has killed a heap of Cortina's cut-throats. He's a splendid-looking fellow, and I'd like to run a trail as a pard of his. You bet he knows how to ride!"

"Sis, if I was a girl, I believe I'd fall in love

with that scout. How is it with you? I saw him toss his sombrero at you."

"Goldie doesn't think of such things," said the captain impatiently. "My darling is satisfied with her old father, and young scamp of a brother. She can't love us, I know, as deeply as we love her, but I don't believe she will let anything come between us."

"Papa, dear, you know well that no stranger ever could be to me what you are. You have always been the kindest and most loving father to me, and must not even talk of ever parting."

"But, oh, dear! I hope we shall get through this cotton business to-morrow; and I shall be greatly relieved when our mules are headed homeward. I shudder when I think of the cruelty of those bandits; but I should have been in continual torture of mind, had I not accompanied you, for I should have been imagining all sorts of horrors all the time you were away."

"Now, let's let up on this sort o' talk," pleaded Gerald. "If I had known the subject of the evening lecture, I should have retired to some secluded spot, to enjoy my supper beyond ear-shot."

"There are no Greasers hereabouts, but relieve your minds, I'll keep guard part of the night."

"I don't think it necessary, my son," said the captain; "and if it was, I would be sentinel myself, not you. The mules will give the alarm at the approach of any danger from man or beast, and I awaken very easily. Goldie, you and Gerald had better take your rest in the Dearborn."

"I must have a smoke, and inspect our surroundings, before I roll in my blankets."

"I have eaten too heartily to lie down yet awhile," was the reply of Little Lightning; "but Sis had better retire at once, for there is a heavy dew falling."

"I will spread our blankets," said Goldie, "and sit awhile. I could not go to sleep at this early hour. Don't you leave camp, Gerald."

While she spoke, the young girl climbed into the Dearborn; and, as she did so, noticed Little Lightning stealing around the outskirts of the opening. The captain had lighted his pipe, and stationed himself on one of the bales of cotton.

Although Goldie had declared that she was not inclined to sleep, a feeling of drowsiness at once took possession of her, and the chorus of a thousand and one night insects and frogs rendered her more sleepy after the long day's journey.

Soon the long lashes of the fair maiden began to droop, the lids veiled the beautiful night scene from her gaze, and she knew nothing more.

This much Captain Gaines discovered when he returned, and calling Gerald, he carefully placed a blanket about Goldie, as a heavy dew was falling, and it was now damp on the banks of the Resaca de la Palma.

Then the youth climbed upon the bales, and sat by his father's side; both gazing, now and then into the dark shades, while they conversed in whispers.

Thus they sat for a long time, deeply impressed by their gloomy surroundings, as they recalled many tragic incidents, which had been related to them in connection with their present camp and its vicinity.

At length both sprung to their feet, for the report of a gun sounded in their ears; evidently a long distance from them, but at the time and place, indicating death to some one, and danger to themselves.

CHAPTER VII.

VIEWING THE GROUND.

CAPTAIN JOHN DONALDSON was one of the handsomest men in Texas. He was brave and fearless, too; and just the man to cope with Cortina, had there not been so many difficulties in his path.

In the first place, it must be understood, that the American side of the Rio Grande was thickly settled at points by Mexicans; some of the towns being more than one-half populated with Mexican citizens of Texas.

This fact enabled Cortina to gain intelligence of every movement of the rangers, as the Texas Mexicans were in sympathy with the bandit chief, and the spies of the latter could go about on the American side at will. Few, indeed, were able to distinguish them from the residents.

Secondly, the bandits being aware of the position of their foes, could cross the river by night, at some ford at which it would be safe for them to do so, and raid here and there among the ranches and smaller towns; retreating into Mexico with their booty, in safety.

Rancheros were shot down in cold blood, and hanged before their own blazing homes; and those who bravely fought to preserve their homes and property were in many instances, after being overwhelmed by numbers, tortured and mutilated in the most shocking manner.

As it was impossible to cross the Rio Grande, except at fords far apart, the banks being in some places two hundred feet high and more, there were times when Cortina's hordes would ride into view on the Mexican side, and utter taunting yells, and make insulting gestures at

the rangers, who were unable to reach them. This so exasperated the Texans, that they made retaliatory raids into Mexico.

The position of Captain Donaldson, when he dispatched Bill Mann for relief was, as his letter to Colonel Ford stated, in a crooked wash-out that had been formed by heavy rains, the same leading to the bank of the Rio Grande. It was not deep, but sufficiently so to shield the horses of the rangers from the bullets of the bandits.

Further north, toward the Government road, used by wagon-trains to transport supplies to the up-river military stations, it was impossible to penetrate the dense chaparral; in fact, a snake would have found it difficult to crawl from out the road on either side. Luckily, Bill Mann had discovered the detachment of bandits on their way to the ford, and through his information Captain Donaldson had gained the favorable position mentioned, where he determined to hold the bandits in check until reinforcements should arrive.

To make the position of the rangers more dangerous, a scout brought in intelligence of another party of the enemy, approaching from down-river, in the rear of the bandits; and this would increase the force against the little band of Texans to a hundred strong.

However, as Bill Mann galloped toward the ford, to gain the Government road, on his way to Brownsville, he met a fellow-scout, and posted him to watch the ford; and, in the event of any body of bandits crossing to the Texas side, to hasten and warn Captain Donaldson of his danger.

Being thus relieved of the anxiety that he felt in that respect, Bill put his horse to full speed; and the first chance he got to make sure of not being ambushed, he struck out from the road, north, through a portion of the chaparral, thus delivering the dispatch in good time, although forced to go a round-about way.

After Bill left the wash-out Captain Donaldson walked up and down the bed of the same encouraging his men, who, with their carbines thrust through a line of low, scattering mesquites, now and then got a chance to draw bead upon some Mexican who imprudently exposed himself in the more sparse chaparral.

When Bill Mann galloped away with the dispatch he passed a thicket within which lay a villainous-looking Greaser, who was evidently very eager to try a shot at the noted scout; in fact, it was not easy for him to control himself, and refrain from so doing. It was evident, however, that he had a purpose in view which restrained him; for, with his visage bearing an exultant grin, he crawled, panther-like, from his covert, making his way, amid cacti and many varieties of thorny shrubs, to the head of the wash-out that concealed the Texas rangers.

Thence he proceeded more cautiously, and at length succeeded in gaining the force of bandits by a route that no sane man would have thought of.

That the intelligence brought by the spy was of great importance could have been seen at once, by the exultation and pleasure manifested by the swarthy cut-throats; and an observer would at once have decided that some important movement was on foot, and that the holding of their present position was one of the essentials necessary to their proposed project.

Immediately after the report of the spy six bandits mounted their horses and walked the animals toward the east, soon followed by six more, the line of bandits keeping up a heavy fire with their *escopetas* to cover the movements of their comrades in the rear.

Thus it happened that, in a few hours after the departure of Bill Mann, there were not more than twenty of the sixty bandits who had been brought to halt in the mesquites; the remainder being on their way, by the chaparral paths, to Brownsville and Resaca de la Palma. This was the case also with the force that had been reported to Donaldson as coming up the river, they having been informed of the proposed operations by the same spy, who had watched the departure of Bill Mann, and who well knew that the scout was on his way to Brownsville for help.

Thus it will be seen that, through information gained by spies, Cortina was enabled to prevent Donaldson's Rangers from advancing toward Brownsville. He knew well, also, that there were but twenty Texans in the gully, and also that the rangers were looking to Colonel Ford for reinforcements.

The bandit chief was aware that there were but thirty rangers in Brownsville; and he reasoned that those, with Colonel Ford at their head, would at once hasten to the assistance of Donaldson, with the full expectation of a victorious encounter.

This would leave Brownsville and vicinity at his mercy; and, as he had information of various cotton trains which had sold out the previous day, and were now encamped on the Resaca, the outlaw chief expected to gain much booty through the plan which he had arranged, and which he had every reason to believe would be successful.

Knowing these facts, the reader can imagine

the rage, amazement and concern of the rangers when Colonel Ford and his men, coming from Brownsville by a circuitous route, joined Donaldson, and all charged into the camp of the bandits. Not an enemy met their view! The line of bandits who had kept up their firing all through the night, having been warned of the approach of reinforcements for the rangers, had withdrawn in time to save their lives, galloping like mad toward Brownsville as soon as they had reached a position where the sound of their horses' hoofs would not be heard.

The plain "sign" left behind, however, showed that a large force had occupied the position, and a dozen corpses proved that the rangers had not wasted their ammunition.

After a close inspection of the ground and the various trails leading therefrom, also the halting-place of another large party of bandits two miles below, who had also separated and galloped toward Resaca de la Palma in small squads—after this, Ford, Donaldson, and all their followers realized what was in the wind. They knew full well that danger and death threatened Brownsville, Resaca de la Palma, and their vicinity.

They now collected together, and in a very short space of time concluded to follow the outlaws. The rangers and scouts from Brownsville joined the party, and all galloped as fast as their fagged horses could travel, filling the night air with the fiercest threats and the most bitter curses—all furiously mad at being thus outwitted by the Wolf of the Chaparral, through the information that the latter had, no doubt, gained through Texas-Mexicans and spies.

And no wonder was it that, at the latter portion of the terrible Cortina war, every Mexican on the Texas side of the Rio Grande was looked upon with suspicion and hatred by the rangers; and that many, who were doubtless innocent of the crimes imputed to them, or in any way connected with Cortina, were hanged like dogs, or shot in their tracks, to avenge some terrible crime that had been committed in their neighborhood.

CHAPTER VIII.

MEETING AN OLD FRIEND.

"WHAT do you make of that, father?" asked Little Lightning, in a low tone, as they both sprang to their feet, at the sound of the rifle-shot.

"I declare, my son, I cannot tell. It does not seem reasonable that any one would shoot at game, at this time; in fact, I do not believe there is any large game so near to Brownsville. A man would not waste a shot at a duck, in such gloom as this; though he might at a coyote in camp. No, it could not have been at game."

"That shot was not fired on the Resaca, father; but some distance south, toward Brownsville—that is, if I know anything about the country."

"You are right, Gerald! So that settles the duck question; for there are no water-holes or streams between here and the Rio Grande. Of that I am positive."

"I am glad," said the youth, "that Goldie was not awakened, for she would have been dreadfully frightened. We ought not to have allowed her to come."

"I know it, my son; I know it! Oh, if anything should happen to part us, I should go insane! May Heaven protect my darling! The more I think of that scout's words, the more concerned and apprehensive I am."

"Don't worry, papa; I'm not scarey about those Greasers. You and I can baste half a dozen of 'em with our shooters, before they can do harm, and if any were left alive, they'd make themselves scarce double-quick."

"My boy," said Captain Gaines, "don't boast! You may be tried yet—terribly tried. You know nothing about shooting at a human being."

"If what I've heard is true, papa, they are not more than half-human. You just wait, and if there is any chance, I'll show you that I can plant a bullet in a bandit's brain, as cool as if I were shooting at a squirrel. I'm wrong there, though; for I should be wild with fury, knowing that Goldie and you were in danger. I think, though, I could fight as well as a man, if the Greasers attacked us. By the way, perhaps that scout, Bill Mann, fired that shot?"

"No, no, my son! He was in Brownsville in an hour after passing us. It could not have been he. A single shot indicates some lurking foe."

"But, let us listen; perhaps we may hear other sounds that will give us an idea of what is going on. If these are bandits at their murderous work, we must keep guard; although Bill Mann assured me they never attacked camps until the return trip, when they knew that the cotton had been disposed of."

For some time, the father and son stood silent. Then both started quickly, for a prolonged report rung on the night air, as if several guns had exploded simultaneously.

The first shot heard by them, was when the Englishman was fired upon by the bandits.

The last was the volley fired by Percy and the scouts together, into the Mexican horsemen.

The loud explosion was followed by a rattling discharge of fire-arms, causing the listeners the utmost wonder and apprehension.

"There's a fight, dead sure," said Little Lightning, excitedly. "What shall we do, father?"

"There is a fight, my son, and a desperate one. We must secrete Goldie in a thicket, and prepare for it!"

"But she will be frightened terribly, papa, if we awaken her."

"Better that, than to be captured by those inhuman monsters, or shot dead in the struggle. Come, Gerald, moments are precious."

Both quickly descended from the load of cotton; but, as they reached the ground, the boy caught his father's arm, and said in a hasty voice:

"Why can't we pitch off the bales, lay four of them in the form of a square, put Goldie inside, and roll two on top? She will be secure from bullets and safe from discovery, I reckon."

"Bless you, my boy," returned the captain, with much relief. "That is an excellent idea. Your judgment is better than mine in an emergency. We will do so at once."

It was with no little difficulty that father and son succeeded in pitching the six bales off the wagon, but every muscle was strained in the effort, and in a short time it was accomplished. When all was done as Little Lightning had suggested, the boy spread blankets inside on the sward, and then hastened to the Dearborn, followed by his father.

"Sis! Goldie!" said the youth, in a guarded tone, placing his hand upon the shoulder of the sleeping girl. "Goldie! wake up! We have made a nest for you that is cosy enough."

The weary maiden started nervously, opening her eyes in wonder. Then Gerald continued:

"Come, Sis; you'll take cold here, and be real sick, sleeping in such a position. I say, we've arranged a nice bed for you."

Goldie was greatly bewildered, and indeed was not fully awakened, when she was assisted from the vehicle, and her father and brother walking by her side, was lifted into the retreat formed by the cotton-bales, without knowing aught of the reason for this new arrangement.

Satisfied that she would be sound asleep as soon as she had reclined upon the blankets, Gerald, with a significant gesture to his father, intimated his wish to put the other bale in the position he had proposed. This was done without a word of remonstrance from Goldie.

Captain Gaines and Gerald then quickly loosened the mules from the wagons, and leading them, two by two, into the mesquites, secured them within the shades, safe from bullets, and perhaps from discovery.

This done, they grasped their rifles, Little Lightning securing a favorite lasso to his belt; and examining their arms, both proceeded to inspect the chaparrals.

The sounds of the fray had proceeded from the opposite side of the Resaca, down the wagon-road toward Brownsville, so our friends had no thought of danger from any other direction, being totally ignorant, as had been Old Rocky and Bill Mann, of the fact that a large force of Cortina's bandits were darting hither and thither in squads among the dark shades on both sides of the Resaca.

"Shall we advance as far as the road, father?" asked Gerald. "I do not feel easy about leaving Goldie there in camp. Good gracious! what would she do if she should awake, and not understand where she was, or why she was placed in such a position?"

"We will not proceed far, my son; but, if you feel concerned, you had better return and keep guard. However, I apprehend no danger, unless it comes from the wagon-road."

"Hold on, papa! Let's stop and listen. All we know of the night's doings is through our ears. I'll try the Indian trick, and place my head to the ground."

"Do so," said his father, "but I don't reckon you'll gain information in that way."

The boy sunk to the earth, and placed his ear upon the hard ground of the path they were following.

Suddenly he sprang up in great excitement, saying:

"I hear horses, father, sure as you're born! The tramp of the hoofs is quite plain, and on the hard road I am certain. They are not coming very fast, and I know that men are riding the horses."

"How do you know that?" asked the captain, quickly.

"By the sound of the hoofs," was the reply. "The regular, steady tramp, which unguided animals would not make."

"What shall we do, my son?"

So impressed had Captain Gaines been by the cool calculations of the boy, that he now felt like consulting him in everything.

"We had better lay low," advised Little Lightning, "and give them hot lead if they turn toward our camp."

"We must be careful and not shoot at white men. It is too dark here to distinguish their character, unless we should hear them speak."

Let us step into this thicket. This wagon-trail leads to our camp, and no other does, to my knowledge."

"But if we know them to be Greasers, father, we must both run to camp as soon as we pull trigger. Then we can slide the top bales along each way, get in the middle and have a good fort, besides having Goldie with us. Brace up, for I hear the horses."

"Yes," whispered the captain, "and they have turned from the wagon-road into this trail. May Heaven protect my poor child!"

Inexperienced as were both father and son in border life, they had neglected until this moment to cock their rifles. No sooner, therefore, did the horseman in advance hear the slight click of the lock than he jerked his animal to a halt, and cried out:

"Hyer's another batch o' ther yaller bell-yuns, er I'm a perrarer pirut! Duck yer brain-boxes down clost'er yer nags' necks, an' arter we turns ther bend in ther trail, gi'n 'em a few blue whistlers. Ther condemned coyotes can't undercomstan' my 'Nited States."

Had not Old Rocky known exactly the lay of the land ahead and to his left, he would not, as a matter of course, have said a word; but he knew that the Resaca prevented foes from escaping south, and that they could not bound into the trail ahead without placing themselves at the mercy of himself and pards. And very fortunate was it for the old scout and all concerned that the parties were thus placed, enabling him to drop his usual prudence and to speak, for Little Lightning was on the point of pressing trigger the instant that Old Rocky's voice was heard.

"Hold, men! For the love of God, hold! We are white, and friends to all Texans."

Thus called out Captain Gaines, and both he and his son stepped from the thicket, as the three horsemen rode up. As the old scout let down the hammer of his pistol, he exclaimed:

"Dang my cats, strangers! Yer hed a clost' call. What in thunderation ye're sneakin' thar in ther briers fer, this time o' night?"

"I'm thinking," burst out Little Lightning, "that you had a close call yourself, old man. I held my iron on you, aiming by your chin-music, and I was about to pull trigger when I saw that you were making a break toward speaking English."

All except Old Rocky burst into loud laughter at this, the old scout being, for once in his life, speechless with amazement at the audacity of one who was evidently, judging from his voice, but a boy.

It was so dark that those who had met thus strangely could not see each others' faces.

Bill Mann, however, knew well who the lurkers were, and he at once spoke up.

"This is Captain Gaines and his son, if I am not greatly mistaken—the very parties we are looking for."

"Glad to see you so soon again, Bill," said the captain, greatly relieved; "indeed I am rejoiced that you came in this direction and brought friends, for we heard firing and apprehended danger."

"I am exceedingly worried and anxious on account of having my daughter with me, and since meeting you I have suffered greatly in mind."

"We-uns hev hed a leetle difficult' wi' ther Greasers," explained Bill, again taking up the vernacular of his old pard. "This hyer gentleman, Mr. Percy, er 'Stan'-ther-Press, es we've cog'd him, war shot, but he skinned through an' stuck ther pepper eater what war goin' ter hash me. Thar's six turned toes on Jackass Perrarer. Whar's yer darter?"

Captain Gaines saluted the Englishman, who appeared weak and weary, as well he might, and then replied:

"Goldie is in camp and asleep, I reckon, but we'll have a talk there, where the moon shines."

Old Rocky caught Little Lightning up before him in the saddle, and they all proceeded onward to the camp, where, in a few moments, they arrived, little dreaming what was in store for them.

Gerald Gaines sprung to the ground, and with his father rushed to the inclosure of cotton-bales, both grasping the end of one of the upper ones and pitching it over to the earth.

The moon shone brightly into the exposed cavity, and Captain Gaines threw up his hands and cried out:

"Oh, my God! My God!"

Then, with a groan of soul-drawn anguish, he sunk to the earth, as though stricken with death.

Little Lightning leaped into the inclosure, hurled the blankets outside, and then bounding out again threw himself upon the sward, and writhed in an agony of mind that dazed his brain and rendered tears and words alike impossible.

CHAPTER IX.

DOUBLY LOST TO HIM.

"DANG my cats!" exclaimed Old Rocky, as he witnessed the movements and actions of Captain Gaines and his son; "what's ther rumpus now? Air ther leetle gal gone?"

"By ther blood o' Crockett!" said Bill in a

voice of fury, as he sprung from his horse and stalked to the side of the captain, adding in a sympathetic tone:

"See hyer, Cap, rouse yerself an' sling gab lively! What does all this mean? Yer doesn't mean ter say thet yer both skuted ther camp an' left Goldie, as yer calls her, hyer alone? Yer doesn't mean ter say thet?"

"God forgive me!" moaned the captain. "Yes, I did leave her here alone and asleep. After we heard your shots, Gerald and I placed her here; but, no, she must be— Call her, gentlemen! Call her, Gerald! I am too weak and prostrated to speak or walk."

Preston Percy, upon entering the camp, had slid from his horse and thrown himself upon the ground in extreme weakness; but, as the captain mentioned his child, he arose quickly and sat staring at him.

Both scouts now secured their horses and began quickly to search the camp, conversing in low tones.

Then they returned, Old Rocky addressing Gerald.

"Leetle Lightnin', ye're a peart boy, an' though I hain't see'd much on yer, I goes heavy on yer bein' chuck full o' vim. Now, hit 'pears thet yer sis air tuck, an' by ther dang'd Greasers, an' we-uns wants ter know ther hull fac's o' ther case. Yer dad air too much bamboozled by ther way things hes panned out ter be wo'th shucks. Rouse yerself an' gi'n us p'int's! Warn't thar no other human critters in yer outfit?"

"Come, leetle pard," added Bill, "shake yerself 'roun', fer Goldie air tuck, dead sure, an' we-uns must work lively toward gittin' her back."

Gerald sprung wildly to his feet, the words of the scouts seeming to have great influence upon him, and clasping his hands over his eyes for a minute, he cried out excitedly:

"Yes, we left her among the cotton-bales when she was half-asleep and scarce conscious of it. We put those two bales on top to shield her, and we found them in the same position as we left them."

"Yer think she c'u'dn't ha' crawled out herself?" queried Old Rocky.

"Certainly not. You can see that the two bales were over the place. She could not have moved them."

"Dang'd ef yer ain't kerrect thar!" agreed the old scout. "Come on, Bill; we-uns must 'vestigate ther chap'rell wi' torches. Ef thar hain't bin ernuther batch o' bellyuns hyer an' skuted on ther sly wi' ther leetle gal, I'll chaw ole rawhide fer grub ther next six moons!"

"May ther good Lord perfect the pore gal!" said Bill Mann, feelingly. "We must try an' save her from ther condemned skunks. Dog-gone my heart ef I kin think o' what 'll come o' her ef we doesn't!"

"Pard," said Old Rocky, as the two lighted pieces of dead mesquite limbs, "ther hull dang'd chap'rells air b'ilin' over wi' Greasers. Dog my cats ef things ain't bin on ther hum ter-night! An' hit 'pears es though they war gittin' more hummer every minut'."

"I know yer ain't in condish fer reg'lar biz; but take a pull et thet whisk', an' we'll scrouge through thergether on this thing, ef hit's ter be did. We'll kerral ther leetle gal ef we hes ter cross ther Grande arter her. Thet Englisher looks es though he'd see'd a ghost. Wonder what's struck him?"

"Don't you remember his story?"

"Dang'd leetle o' hit. Fer he slung gab too fast."

"Wa-al, he's searchin' fer a gold-ha'r'd gal—his cousin—an' since he heerd ther Cap speak o' his darter, he's bin sot back, an' looks real lunny."

"I war goin' ter tell him 'bout ther gal, an' I calkerlates to arter we-uns hes gazed arter sign."

The torches being ignited, the two scouts proceeded to examine the ground from the cotton-bales to the thickets on the westside of the camp, while Little Lightning followed them, ride in hand.

"Stan'-ther-Press" was in a most bewildered condition.

The excitement through which the Englishman had passed, his wound and his fatigue, had thrown him into such a state as to be prepared for almost anything that might happen; still, the mere mention of a golden-haired maiden, in such a scene and under such circumstances, had been too much for him.

He had bent his whole mind upon finding this little cousin of his, and he had always pictured her to himself as the image of her mother, a portrait of whom was in his possession.

Soon, however, he relapsed into his former condition, although he saw the scouts set out with their torches, and realized that they were in search of a maiden that had been abducted from the camp. But his mind and body were now in such a state that he cared but little for the fact, reasoning with himself that his two friends would probably find her.

Captain Gaines no sooner saw that his daughter was gone than he gave way, as we have seen, to helpless despondency, for he had not the slightest doubt that Goldie had been captured by Mexican outlaws, who could not be traced or

trailed in such a section, and where there were, doubtless, many parties of bandits, as Old Rocky had intimated.

It was the totally unexpected calamity, the unlooked-for bereavement, that for the time dazed the old man. The shock had come when he believed her to be sleeping peacefully in a secure hiding-place, and it had found him unable to bear up against it.

He now sat leaning against the cotton-bales, which were valueless in his eyes, and as he meditated, he began to realize that those who were strangers to him were now seeking to find the trail of the abductors. Then his feelings underwent a change, and he resolved to overcome his weakness, and to recover Goldie at the hazard of his life.

It was at this moment that Preston Percy threw off the weakness and fatigue that had ruled him, and crawled to the side of Captain Gaines. The two men gazed into each other's eyes, each reading great suffering in the other—the one physical, the other mental.

"My friend," said the Englishman, "pardon me, but I heard you speak of the golden-haired child you have lost. As these scouts will tell you, I received my wound and gained their acquaintance by my interest in and search for a young lady like the one they describe. Look at this picture and please relieve my mind. Is this lost girl your own child, and if not, does this resemble her?"

As Percy spoke he drew a locket from his bosom and held it before the face of Captain Gaines.

No sooner did the captain fix his eyes upon this picture than his face became ghastly, and his whole frame trembled with emotion painful to witness.

Percy now felt sure that he had a clew—a hope, although obscure and doubtful—and he cried out:

"Is this girl your daughter? I would not ask this, but I have been led to believe that a maiden had been adopted by a family in Southern Texas, and it is on that account that I am here."

In a hoarse, unnatural voice, Captain Gaines at last answered him:

"What is it to you, sir, what my daughter is like, or whether she is my child by birth or adoption? Why do you torture me thus? I have more trouble and grief already than I can well bear."

"You see this picture," returned Percy. "Again I ask, is there any resemblance between it and the lost girl? I have good and sufficient reasons for asking, and far be it from me to put any more trouble upon you—just the opposite."

Still the captain was silent. The Englishman went on:

"Should she be yours, only by adoption, I am willing to recognize your claims. You are still her father, if she so desires. You have only that to rejoice in, if she prove to be the child I am in search of."

The face of Captain Gaines grew brighter. After a moment's hesitation he replied:

"Goldie is not my daughter, but I love her as one. The picture you have shown me is her exact counterpart."

"What were the circumstances," asked Percy, in some excitement, "connected with the adoption?"

"I found her in a boat," was the reply, "which had drifted on shore below the lighthouse at Matagorda Bay twelve years ago. She was then about four years of age. I have loved her as my own child, and—rising in great excitement—"I swear, before high Heaven, that blood shall flow before any one shall tear my darling from me!"

Captain Gaines gazed upon the Englishman with a look of hatred and suspicion, evidently thinking, in his demoralized mental condition, that the man who had such astonishing proofs of his right to find and secure his adopted child was but torturing him—was probably himself the author of the outrageous abduction, through hired agents; his clothing, though torn and stained, proving, as well as his manner, that he was of high station.

This, to the grief-dazed brain of the captain, seemed a solution of the mystery.

This lasted only for a moment—not long enough for Percy, in his astonishment, to form words of remonstrance, or offer further explanation. Then Captain Gaines, seeming to have forgotten the existence of his son, as well as the peril in which his property was placed, darted from the camp, grasping saddle and bridle as he ran, and gaining a dark thicket, where he had secured a fine saddle-mule the previous evening.

Hastily equipping the animal, he mounted, and regardless of the outcries from the camp, he spurred up the Resaca de la Palma at terrific speed along a stock path, his eyes fixed and staring forward, and he disregarded the cruel thorns that scratched his hands and face, and even tore his clothing and his flesh.

Thus on, through dark shades and moonlit openings, dashed Captain Gaines, more like a maniac than a sane being.

And no wonder was it, that he was thrown into such a state; for the fear, the dread of his

life, since he had found Goldie, and learned to love her, had been that some claimant would appear, and tear his darling from him. But this night, it had come upon him with a hundred-fold intensity; and the shock was more than he was able to bear.

Not only had Goldie been abducted from the camp, but a man had appeared, whose revelations proved beyond dispute that he had some right to take the girl whom he had reared from babyhood as his own, from his arms and his heart forever!

Not for a moment did Captain Gaines entertain the promises of Preston Percy, that he should not be parted from Goldie, even should it be proven that she was the lost heiress of the Percys.

The uppermost thoughts in the tortured mind of the poor man were, first, that his darling was in the power of enemies who sought to secure and retain her; and secondly, that, in the event of her rescue by two scouts, one stood ready to tear her from him. Utterly demoralized in mind, by these gloomy facts, he resolved that he would find and rescue his darling, and flee with her to some point where the Englishman would not be able to find her.

CHAPTER X. ON THE TRAIL.

"GIN'RALLY speakin', I ain't sot back by nothin'; but I sw'ar—yes, I gces heftier, an' says, dang my ole heart ef things ain't gittin' scrouged onder we-uns purty thick! Bill, ther leetle gal hev bin gobbled by Greasers, dead sure an' sartin. Fact air, ther hull chap'rell air chuck full o' dangnation!"

Thus spoke Old Rocky, after he and his pard had searched the thickets adjoining the camp.

"She's bin tuck," agreed Bill Mann; "thet's a fact, but she's gut ter be reskyed an' fotched back, sure es shootin'. I hes run a heap o' risks, bin without see-estars an' grub, an' rushed through on biz ontill I'm slimsy an' 'bout played out, but I'll go without sleep an' feed es long es I kin stan' up, ter resky Goldie from the dang'd pepper-eaters!"

As Bill Mann ceased speaking the two scouts heard wild outcries; and, as they broke from the bushes, a strange sight met their view.

Little Lightning, who had been awaiting them, in an agony of anxiety, was now running toward the camp calling in pleading tones to his father, who was dashing madly, upon a snorting mule, and gazing straight ahead, without heeding the outcries of his son. Almost instantly, he disappeared from the "open," into the depths of the chaparral, up Resaca de la Palma.

The scene was a bewildering one. The beautiful moonlit "open" was framed in luxuriant plant, and shrub, and tree, of a hundred varieties; and the silver sheen of the waters to the south was broken only by the ambulance, the wagons, and the cotton-bales—the only evidences of civilization, if we except Little Lightning.

The only other actor in it was "Stan'-ther-Press," who certainly did not appear to be able to stand the press of the night, if events continued; although he was now making a furious break at one more venture.

Seated upon his horse, spurring for life, his head bound up in the blood-stained kerchief, and his garments in tatters, he bent forward in his saddle, with his eyes fixed upon the point at which Captain Gaines had disappeared. On he dashed in pursuit, almost crushing Gerald in his mad course, and crashing wildly out of the "open."

As Bill Mann and Old Rocky gazed open-mouthed, the apparently insane horseman darted from view, in a moment's time, like the flash of a meteor.

Just then, Little Lightning, with a piercing cry, shot into the dark shades in pursuit; springing upon a mule, as the scouts knew by the snorting of the animal, and the crash of bushes that followed.

All this occurred so rapidly, that the beholders spoke not a word, nor even looked at each other, until the little moonlit open was silent as death itself; no sounds coming from the strange trio of night-riders. Then Old Rocky threw his torch from him into the waters of the Resaca, cast his sombrero to earth, and jammed his right foot upon it; these two movements being almost simultaneous, the hissing of the torch still sounding, as he cried out, with feelings such as he had never before experienced, and which, it must be admitted, were what might have been expected:

"Wa-al, may I be gobbled by a alligator, spit out, an' scarified clean to ther biz part o' my 'naterny, an' ther rest o' me nibbled ter death by dipper-ducks! Bill, h'ist yer shooter, an' bat my brains out, fer I doesn't keer ter run lunny by ther pure XXX double-distilled cussedness o' ther Rio Grande section o' ther biggest an' bestest piece o' dirt in 'Nited States. What in thunderation does all this hyer mean?"

These words were rattled off rapidly, as Bill Mann cast aside his torch, placed his sombrero carefully upon the ground, and then sunk down beside it, stroking his chin, as he stared toward the point, where the men whom he and his pard

had been striving to assist, had disappeared in an instant; all apparently gone mad—furiously mad!

"They're a puserlanimous passel o' puppyish perceders!" asserted the old scout; with a comical mixture of contempt and indignation. This was emphasized by a far-reaching squirt of tobacco-juice, as he added, reflectively:

"Mebbe so ther Cap's bin hyer afore, knows a crossin' up-crick, an' jedged ther Greasers hed tuck his leetle gal thet-a-way; an' so he's le-vanted et stompede speed ter make ther ford, thinkin' he's gut a dead sure thing o' ketchin' 'em."

"Thet doesn't go down, pard," said Bill, decidedly. "He's fresh on ther Grande, I knows; an' thar ain't no reason in bit, fer I tuck a speedy fortygraph o' his mug when he war on ther whiz. He's crazy sot on somethin' billyus, an' thet Englisher air mixed up with hit; Little Lightning hev'n nothin' ter do in ther game, fer he's b'ilin' over ter cotch ther ole man."

"Dang'd ef sich doin's ain't calkerlated ter make a pilgrim crawl back up-kentry, an' dig spurs on ther crawl! Hit war usin' we-uns party mean an' or'nary, dead sure an' sartin. What's ter be did? I'm a-huntin' Greasers, an' I hes lost consider'ble many in ther las' week, layin' 'roun' Brown, a leetle too much on ther errigate."

"This circus beats me. I knows ye're a-gittin' yer idees sharpened, Bill, an' both on us is gittin' a sot-down which yer needs more'n this ole raw-hide ripper does."

As Old Rocky spoke, he tore off a big chew of "nigger-head," picked up his sombrero, and jammed it on his head viciously.

Bill Mann covered his brows with his hands, leaned his elbows on his knees, and for a moment studied their position deeply. Then he sprung to his feet, and cried out, in a voice of relief:

"Ole Rock, I've gut ther hull biz down to a dot."

"Wa-al, pard, spit her mighty suddint-like," said the old scout; "though I doesn't on this hyer trip think yer hes struck ther bull's-eye. Ef yer hes, I'll shake an' yer kin call on me nex' trip for a quart o' ther bestest bug-juice."

"Why, dang hit, ole pard!" returned Bill, "hit's es plain es Santa Ana's Peak from Per-corn crick. Hit's all 'bout ther lost gal. The fac' are ther Englisher went fer ther ole man 'bout ther gal he's bin huntin' fer years an' ther ole Cap 'splained matters which proved Goldie war ther caliker, sure an' sartin. I knows jist how hit war."

"Then ther Britisher went b'ilin' mad w' glad, an' swore he'd hev her ef she war brung'd back. He's half-lunny, anyway, from his wound an' ther ole Cap's clean lunny from ther Greasers hev'n tuck Goldie; an' so they hes started off on a wile-goose chase—ther ole man swarin' he'll resky her an' keep her hid erway from ther Englisher."

"Thet's ther plain case o' ther matter."

"Shake, pard Bill! I owes ther errigate. Dog my cats, ef yer kerbase ain't clear! Ah! I'm a ole bug-eatin', bamboozled fool! This are a purty kittle o' fish. Hyer's Cap Gaines lost his bootiful darter what he loved so dang'd much—I takes yer word fer all this, Bill—hyer are his cotton, his wagguns an' mules; a hefty lay-out. An' now, without sayin' 'By-by,' Leetle Lightning hes skuted et stompede speed, right ahead inter ther wustest part o' ther chap'rells, whar he's sure ter git his 'naterny bored by Greaser bullets. Dang'd ef things doesn't glide ormighty queer on this ball o' dirt!"

"He skuted inter this purty camp ter-night with a purty darter, a son, an' a heap o' wealth, an' now he's lost all an' air tryin' ter lose hisself!"

"Since we-uns struck Jackass Ferrarer ther most mixed an' hefty circusses an' meenad-geries an' side-shows a plenty, hes bin shoved onder us. Sich doin's beats me! I'm plum' bamboozled, an' feels like gittin' down an' chawin' grass an' dirt out o' pure vexashe an' indig'. Ag'in I axes, Bill, what's ter be did?"

"Hit air a ormighty mixed mess, Ole Rock," agreed his pard, with a puzzled and concerned look and voice, "but the wustest part o' hit war ther takin' o' Goldie, an' now thar's ther fol-lerin' o' Little Lightning arter ther condemned lunny fools, his dad an' 'Stan'-ther-Press, what hes a hefty press o' biz shoved onder him ter-night from fust ter last."

"They're all dead-goners, Bill, sure; an' ther leetle gal needs us, I reckon, purty bad. Though I sw'ar hit 'ud be 'bout es hard es locatin' a per-tickler tick on a mule's hinder, ter find her per-sish 'bout now. Some Greaser's gut her an' a dang'd pepper-eater et thet!"

"Thar's more'n one in ther biz, Old Rock."

"Cos why? How'd yer perduce thet var-dict? I see'd only show o' 'sign' fer one human, what laid in ther bush, an' arterward struck up ther soft stock-path with a hefty load, his huffs grindin' dirt deep."

"Does yer think one human c'u'd lift a bale o' cotton, Ole Rock?"

"Dog-gone my gran'mother's tom-cat, Bill! I b'lieve yer war lyin' when yer said yer war sleepy an' played-out; fer ye're es sharp es a

gar's tooth ter-night. Mebbe yer kin 'splain why ther bale o' cotton war put back ag'in?"

"Ter gain time an' groun' from this hyer camp. Ther cusses war sharp watchin' an' they knowed ther Cap an' Leetle Lightning 'ud soon be back, an' moughtn't 'zamine ther cotton lay-out ef hit war squar'. Ef they lef' bit on ther groun' they'd be soon follered."

"Shake ag'in, Bill! My head's full o' bugs ter-night an' they're all on ther buzz, which ain't a great wonder, I sw'ar. But, come on, pard; gab won't resky ther caliker."

"Thet's all hunk; but how 'bout this lay-out? We-uns must on-lariat ther mules an' hobble 'em. I reckon ther anermiles 'll linger 'roun' ther wagguns. We'd orter 'cache' ther blankets an' traps in ther amberlance, in ther chap'rell; but we-uns must levant in double-quick."

In a very short space of time the mules were hopped in the "open," and then Old Rocky and Bill Mann mounted their horses, and glided along, the trails in the dark chaparrals being well known to the scouts.

On they went in the direction taken by the abductors of Goldie Gaines, but with little hope of rescuing her, or even gaining any knowledge of her whereabouts. It was only, as Old Rocky expressed it, "huntin' dang'd pepper-eaters, an' takin' chances o' strikin' ther lay-out what hed kerral'd ther caliker."

CHAPTER XI.

THE BANDIT CHIEF.

LESS than forty-eight hours previous to the shooting of the Englishman Percy, by the Mexican assassin, on the borders of Jackass Prairie, the former had been in Matamoras, Mexico, a city situated directly across from the town of Brownsville, on the lower Rio Grande.

He had taken quarters in a hotel on the west side of the main plaza, on the opposite side of which towered the double-spired cathedral, which was the grandest edifice in the city, a very imposing structure, around and even within which many bloody fights occurred during the fierce war between the Rojos and Crinolinas—in other words, the Liberal and Church parties.

Percy was a young man of fine appearance and of excellent education—indeed, a gentleman in every sense of the word; as we have seen, he was honest, fair, and just beyond the average, or he would never have interested himself in the fate of the child, to whom much of the wealth he now enjoyed must go, should he find her.

Ever eager in his search, and very communicative in regard to the same, he had one day, while seated in the gentlemen's parlor conversing with an English-speaking guest of the house, revealed his main object in crossing the ocean, and his intention of visiting Brownsville in a day or two, to purchase cotton from the Texans, and to make inquiries in regard to his lost relative.

At the same time he displayed the picture of the child's mother.

Had Percy been in any other place than a foreign country, in which his own language was not spoken, he would not have conversed with the stranger, much less have given him his confidence, for the man was not one whose face invited either familiarity or confidence. Just the opposite, indeed. A man who had seen much of the world, or who was more than the most superficial observer of the human expression, would have avoided him—would, indeed, have been repelled by his face.

However, when one is in a country where his mother tongue is almost entirely unknown, he will be delighted, in most cases, to come in contact with one with whom he can converse without consideration of grade, education, or any very critical study of costume or character. Consequently, we may vote the young Englishman excusable.

Percy had been casually addressed by this man in English, and had improved the acquaintance with pleasure, liberally indulging in wine while in his company at dinner; hence he did not notice the look of exultation or the start that his newly-made acquaintance gave, when his eye rested upon the picture of the lost child's mother.

Had it ever occurred to the Englishman to study the face of the man he was so carelessly confiding in, he would have detected an uncalled-for glitter of the eye, and a triumphant expression of feature, even previous to this. Especially was this the case when he spoke of the young girl's being, if alive, heiress to a hundred thousand pounds in bank, besides vast estates. After this, however, he had described the reported manner of the loss, and the supposed location of the landing of the boat with the sea waif.

The stranger had introduced himself as Juan Peres, but had said nothing of his residence or occupation.

On the day following, Percy crossed the Rio Grande; but during his confidential chat with Juan Peres, the latter had cunningly, and without any apparent interest or object in so doing, gained much information in regard to the es-

tates in England, and had been left for some minutes alone in Percy's apartment.

Before leaving the hotel Percy missed a packet of family letters, which were, however, of no value to any one except himself, but which he failed to recover through the agency of the low-browed, swarthy police of the town, whose duty seemed to be solely to drag a huge unhooked saber, rattling over the pave behind them.

We must now follow Juan Peres, and ascertain his real character, history and intentions, and keep up with the latter as far as possible.

Juan was of medium height, thin in flesh, and quick in motion as a flash of light. His eyes were black and treacherous in expression; his complexion was sufficiently dark to prove him a Mexican, which he really was; but he was a Texan by birth, and had enjoyed the benefit of the schools in San Antonio de Bexar, where, even in the streets, children were at any time to be seen at play, conversing in three or four languages among each other—and this, from the childhood association of street and school, of as many nationalities.

In consequence of this, Juan was proficient as a linguist; indeed, far above most of the higher class in his own country, although of the lower order himself. It was only, truth to say, from the mere accident of his having been born under the flag of the Lone Star Republic, previous to annexation, that his education had been received.

But, in spite of such advantages, he was low in his associations; indeed, he had been engaged in horse and cattle stealing at an early age, having been connected with many outlaw bands in Texas ere he was yet out of his teens, and had been forced to fly to Mexico on account of several homicides or assassinations.

His course and depredations extended south, from his native city to the Bay of Matagorda on the shore of the Gulf.

In this way, he had become acquainted with all the rancheros, vaqueros, teamsters, and cowboys, along the route mentioned.

Hence, when he heard the story of the young Englishman, he felt that he had struck a trail to a bonanza. It was merely as the part of a spying expedition that he had been at the hotel. He now knew, from the circumstances, as related by Percy, that the beautiful daughter of Captain Gaines, who "ranch" near Victoria, after at Oakville—a golden-haired maiden of sixteen summers—was the missing heiress of the English estates and gold. There could be no doubt of this, whatever; for age, description, and circumstances corresponded exactly. The picture of the English mother would have settled all doubts, had there been room for any.

The intense joy of the bandit may be imagined.

He saw before him a brilliant career, such as he had never before even dreamed of.

He would at once, at any risk, at any cost of gold, or life, or of his followers in crime, secure Goldie Gaines. This he could do, by making a raid into Texas. Once he had the girl in his power, he would force her into a marriage with himself, hunt Percy to his death, and then on, with his fair bride, to "Merrie England," where he would drop gently into a life of luxurious splendor, and move in the highest circles, among earth's most favored ones.

Heretofore, he had been up and down in this matter of wealth; leading a helter-skelter bandit existence, with his life held loosely in his hand. But he had risen to be a trusted lieutenant and friend to Juan Cortina, the Scourge of the Rio Grande.

He had secured a bunch of letters from Percy, in order that he might be posted with reference to the friends and the location in England in which he was interested; and, with them he would be able to prove his story to Cortina, though this would hardly be necessary.

Not a moment did he linger, after his success in this matter.

Juan Peres hastened to the suburbs of the city, by a narrow street, leading from the main plaza westerly; reaching the terminus of which, where before him stretched the wide prairie, thirty miles to the northwest, treeless and waterless, and without a break or dwelling, until at the distance mentioned, where Reonosa was located.

To his left, on the Rio Grande, were a few miserable huts, and a scattering line of mesquites, marking the river. But a short distance further, was the adobe-walled grave-yard, where hundreds of poor fellows had, blindfolded, and bound, and placed upon their knees facing the ancient wall that inclosed consecrated ground—seemingly in mockery—been shot in the back, victims of the monthly revolutions, by the heartless volunteer forces of perhaps a day's irregular organization.

Juan Peres paused for a moment, to gaze toward the river which divided him from the prize that he had in view. He then glanced on the other side, with a scowl and a grating of teeth, as if some friend or friends had been there, in a murderous manner, lost to him or

that, possibly, he had himself good cause for hating the spot on his own account.

And well might he; for, against that same wall, bound and upon his knees, he had heard the sounding of the rammers sending home the leaden balls that were intended to rend his own vitals, and end his criminal career—sounds that he would hear in his ears forever!

While yet those ominous sounds rung through the air behind him, others, that filled him with joy and relief, had reached him.

The clattering of many hoofs, and stern yells in command, in a voice well known to him—these, followed by a thunderous volley, curses, cries of death, terror, dread and dismay, coming from the very men who were to send him from earth—and then his bonds were cut, the kerchief torn from his eyes, and he was jerked to his feet, while in his ears rung the words:

"Look again on the sun and plain, *compadre mio*, Juan Peres! Cortina, *el Ranchero*, has kept his word!"

He had felt himself placed upon a horse, supported there in his weak state, and then heard the words, in a well-known tone:

"*Vamonos, soldados bravos! Vamonos!*"

He knew that he was being borne in a mad gallop from that hated wall, and then his senses had left him.

Recalling all this, was it a wonder that the outlaw raised his clinched fist and shook it in the direction of the graveyard, with a muttered curse on his tightly-drawn lips, drawn over white and glittering teeth? Was it a wonder that he now sped toward the *jacals* to his right, with hasty and eager step sprung upon his steed and galloped over the plain toward Reonosa—the way which led him toward Cortina *el Ranchero*, his rescuer and chief?

CHAPTER XII.

THE SCOURGE OF THE RIO GRANDE.

THAT Juan Peres had been in the city of Matamoras, as a spy, has been mentioned in the preceding chapter, and that he was, when there, traveling openly, was a fact. For Cortina was an honored and a favored man among the local authorities all along the Rio Grande at the time he was devastating the Texas side of the river for two hundred miles from the Gulf of Mexico westward.

Being born and reared in Texas, he well knew the whole Rio Grande section of the State; in fact, his mother still lived on her Texan ranch at the time when Juan was most noted as a bandit.

Fifteen indictments for murder were against his name in Texas, before he "skipped" the State for Mexico, the last being his shooting the sheriff of Brownsville in his tracks when the latter was attempting his arrest. And since then Juan Peres had actually passed over into Brownsville from Matamoras in the disguise of a common Greaser, with a *serape* or blanket, and a sombrero of prodigious size.

He had ascertained that Colonel Ford had dispatched Donaldson's Rangers up the river on an expedition against Cortina, and that about a score and a half of rangers and scouts were left in the town; Captain Matt Nolan and Captain Littleton, with their men, being further up the river, expecting a raid in the vicinity of Ringold Barracks.

This was valuable information, for Cortina, in place of being above Comargo, as the Texans supposed, was but a few miles above Reonosa.

If Donaldson should pass the latter place, then Brownsville and its vicinity would be at the mercy of the bandits, and rich booty might be secured on the *Resaca de la Palma*.

On the evening of the day on which Juan Peres left Matamoras, he rode into the camp of his chief, which was situated in a huge chasm, or "wash-out," with walls fifty feet in height, which extended from the river inland. In the middle of this was a narrow and winding fissure, which a man could spring across, leading up and down, a miniature, in fact, of the extensive camp.

In its depths one might hear the rush of waters, which were easily reached by buckets let down by lariats. The tops of the high banks were fringed with mesquites, and the same near the river, commanded a view of the Texas side of the country for some distance up and down.

The horses under guard were driven by a small side wash-out to the plain above to graze.

This was a natural, but secure fort, but it had been chosen more because of its being free from all the vexatious thorny cacti, than for anything else. All along both sides of the narrow break in the huge wash-out, which was a hundred feet across its bed, and the same distance across the top, were scattered groups of the most forbidding-looking set of men ever collected together. Men with low brows, and snake eyes, and hair that was long and coarse as that of an Apache.

Many of them were fully as hideous, and merciless, and bloodthirsty as the most savage Indians, and with a deadly hatred to all Americans.

Of course there were some few exceptions; some were youthful recruits, who had run away from their homes on the Texan side, that the might have the "honor" of serving under

one whose iron will, deep hatred and reckless daring had made him the Texans' most dreaded foe.

Arms of every description, country and make were scattered about or leaning against the banks, and the costumes of the bandits were varied and fanciful, some sporting even the beaded leggings of the Indian.

Each and every one, however, wore the inevitable red sash, which girded his waist in many folds, the long fringed ends hanging down on each side. These sashes sustained both breeches and arms, the latter consisting of knives of all sizes and make, from the *cuchillo*, or long knife of Mexico, which predominated, to the bowie of the Texan.

Strange as it may appear, red woolen shirts were generally worn, which were readily seen, and which offered such a plain mark for Texan rifles. The camp, so picturesque throughout, seen under camp-fires, would have enraptured to ecstasy an artist of the Rembrandt school.

Juan Peres rode down the little wash-out from the plain on his foam-flecked steed and galloped down the side of the camp, along the lines of bandits, each and all removing the inevitable shuck cigarette from their lips, and raising their sombreros. Then there sounded in welcome, joyous tone from all:

"Viva! Viva! Viva!!! Viva Senor Capitan Peres!"

Juan Peres raised and waved his richly-ornamented sombrero, and rode on to the northernmost end of the encampment, near the "jumping-off place" into the Rio Grande more than two hundred feet below.

Here he sprung from his horse near an awning of rich-colored Mexican blankets, his bridle-rein being grasped by a young bandit.

Beneath this awning was a rude table, covered, however, by a brilliant *serape*, and on it were fruits, food and bottles of liquors, while huge bales of blankets formed substitutes for chairs and couches.

A magnificent saddle rested upon a bale of these blankets, and a bridle, spurs, and lariat of hair hung from the horn of it, the spurs being of gold, and the saddle and bridle a mass of filagree in silver.

But the most noticeable feature of this Mexican canopy was a man of splendid physique and handsome face, his hair long and black, his eyes of the same color and piercing as those of an eagle, but ever wandering suspiciously, as if expecting, and even anxious for danger, which his air and manner showed plainly that he would meet and conquer.

Mustache and goatee in graceful wave, and large, but not too large for the well-rounded face, the complexion of which was more Castilian than Mexican; though tanned from a lifetime spent under southern skies, and from being constantly in the open air from his earliest childhood.

Erect, straight as the lance-shaft of a Comanche but supple as a panther, such was the man, who, with but the faintest suspicion of a smile—all, however, that he ever expressed—welcomed his lieutenant, Juan Peres. For the man we have described was the commander of the largest and most destructive organization of bandits that ever cursed American soil—none other than Juan N. Cortina; or, as he called himself, Cortina *El Ranchero*, and also known as the Wolf of the Chaparrals, and the Scourge of the Rio Grande!

His exploits as a bandit, and afterward as a general in the Mexican army, and commander-in-chief of the northeast forces of Mexico, with headquarters at Matamoras, where his military career was disgraceful and infamous—he decoying Mexican officers, who, from political opposition had exiled themselves in Brownsville, into Matamoras, under promise of freedom and reinstatement, and then causing them to be bound and marched to execution by the old wall of the graveyard before mentioned—need not, perhaps, be particularized. It is well-known, however, that the honorable and gentlemanly soldier, General Cobas, was one of his victims.

Well did Juan Peres know his commander, and he wasted no words but touched the proffered hand, and bowed slightly; while he said promptly, and with a firm but respectful voice:

"Good news, my chief and friend! Colonel Ford, with only about thirty men, is in Brownsville. Donaldson has started up the Bravo, and must be, if he passed the Reonosa Ford, directly across the river at the present time, watching or sending out scouts.

"Nolan and Littleton are near Rio Grande City. Draw Ford from Brownsville, split up and hold Donaldson, and send two hundred men to dash through the *Resaca* camps. Two hundred more can be sent in a body to sack Brownsville, and the whole force can easily destroy Donaldson and Ford. When that is done, Nolan and Littleton are at our mercy, and the Rio Grande for two hundred miles is open to us for months before other forces can be formed.

"This is my report and plan, my capitan."

"Juan Peres, my friend and trusted officer, you have done and planned nobly. For this service, ask any favor, after our raid, and it shall be granted. Seat yourself now, and drink and feast; for I must send you on the mission to

the chaparrals and shades of Resaca de la Palma."

Could Cortina have seen the fiendish look of exultation that was expressed upon the face of Juan Peres, after the chief had left the awning to order his men to boots and saddles, he would have expected treachery toward himself.

Juan was so overjoyed that he could not swallow a morsel of food, but contented himself with pouring down wine without stint.

Cortina stalked among his men, selecting and sending out single spies, to steal over the river the coming night, and inspect Donaldson's camp, as well as to Brownsville; explaining to these spies his proposed raid.

Immediately all was bustle and confusion. The horses were driven into the vast wash-out, thus adding to the indescribable scene. And, during this tumult, when Cortina had returned to the vicinity of his awning where he stood with folded arms, gazing back upon his bustling hordes of fiendish murderers and thieves, a sudden bush in comparison to the former confused clamor fell upon the camp; while every man ceased whatever occupation engaged him, the eyes of all being now bent upon the gully which led from the upper plain.

And, down this gully, and into the camp, passing toward the station of Cortina, advanced at a walk four horsemen evidently members of the command, while a fifth was bound upon a horse, led by lariats by two of the advance squad; the rear two having their *escopetas* ready, watching the bound captive as though they expected him to break away from them. And no wonder.

Cortina! God created you in a noble form. Did He not create one redeeming atom in your mind—one atom of admiration for all that was noble and grand in another? It must have once been there, but you have crushed it out; leaving your nature more deformed and debased than that of the merciless Apaches, who tear the reeking scalps from the heads of their victims with their teeth, and devour the yet quivering hearts of their enemies slain in war.

Yes, more brutal, more fiendish than they; for they have never known aught but savage influences and surroundings.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHARP EYE, THE SEMINOLE.

THE captive, brought into the camp of Cortina, the bandit chief, was bound fast upon the bare back of a snorting, half-wild steed; but seated in a natural position, a lariat securing his limbs beneath the animal, while his arms were bound behind his back in a painful manner.

He was an Indian, a noble specimen of his people at that. Naked from the waist up, nothing but tattered buckskin leggings covering his sinewy limbs; but these showing beautiful workmanship, and freshness in places where not stained by blood and dirt, he bore all the appearance of having come through a terrible struggle.

A beaded belt held in place the leggings, and portions of a collar made from the claws of a grizzly bear hung about his scratched and bruised neck. His broad and bronzed face was also much bruised, and upon one of his huge muscular arms, commencing at the shoulder and reaching nearly to the elbow, was a terrible, gaping gash, from which the blood had flowed freely, and was dripping, drop by drop, to the ground.

A beaded fillet held three broken eagle-feathers, and confined but slightly a long mass of black hair that hung tangled to his horse's back. His large black eyes glared with undaunted daring, intense scorn, contempt and hatred—glared into the face of Cortina, as if he would strike the bandit to the earth by his gaze.

The horse, a superb coal-black steed, with wild flowing mane, tail, and forelock, seemed to have been created for the rider; and crouching slightly upon its haunches, its tail sweeping the clay floor of the great chasm, it glared, with fiery eyes and foamy mouth, straight at the bandit chief, as if man and mustang were agreed in their hatred of the man before whom they had been forced.

It did not seem possible for such a vast assemblage of brutal outlaws, especially occupied as they had been, to become at once so profoundly stilled and impressed. Not a word had been said by the captors, nothing but a significant glance at their leader; the presence of the captive being, it seemed, a sufficient report, and all that was expected from them.

Cortina's face wore a placid, unmoved expression, and he looked coldly and cavelessly, as he stood with folded arms, up into the terrible eyes that, it almost seemed, would have caused savage, famished panthers, at the moment of bounding upon him, to cower, and cringe, and crawl to covert.

Juan Peres actually turned ghastly as, for an instant, he imagined that terrible gaze to be turned upon himself; and well might he pale and tremble; no wonder his guilty conscience filled him with terrible fears, as will be shown as we proceed. The silence lasted but a few moments, however, and, strange to say, was

broken by the captor, in a voice of thunder, expressing the same feelings as shot from his eyes.

"Sharp Eye, the Seminole, has come! Cortina, the dog—Cortina, the coward—Cortina, the thief and snake, that stung Senola, the Star of the Seminoles, the daughter of Wild-Cat, the great chief, is before him; but the arms of Sharp Eye are bound.

"If the arms of Sharp Eye were free he would throw the heart of Cortina to the buzzards. He would feed the cat-fish of the Big River (Rio Grande) with his flesh, and the coyotes should gnaw his bones. The bones of Wild-Cat would turn in their grave, and the spirit of the great chief would come from the happy hunting-grounds, did he know that Senola the Star had been crushed by a dog, and had jumped from the high bank into the Big River.

"Dog! Son of a sneaking coyote! Sharp Eye, the last of the Seminoles that spurned the accursed whites' lands, when they had robbed the nation of our people, and slain treacherously Osceola—Sharp Eye, the Seminole, spits upon you! I have spoken!"

"Sharp Eye has come," returned Cortina, still unmoved; "he has come, I see; but only when brought. Cortina knows nothing of Senola, the Star, for he never saw her more than a few times. Had you come to me I could have told you this. She was a very pretty squaw, but I know nothing of her, and I care nothing. She has nothing to do with my having had you brought here.

"You had sworn to lead the Texanos, the white dogs you have spoken of, into my mountain stronghold. I had information that you were to do so, and were about to send a runner to Ford, the chief of the rangers, or Old Rip, as they call him.

"Had you done this, both I and my band would have been massacred. You and I cannot live in the same world. Sharp Eye, although you are the last of the chiefs who refused a reservation from the Americans, and sought home in Mexico instead, yet you must die!

"However, I think you have been mistaken; for Wild-Cat left a son and two daughters. The son may live to become a chief, and the daughter—well, is she as pretty as Senola?"

This Cortina asked with a cold sneer. It was terrible. The just, the insane rage, the herculean efforts the heroic red chief made to free himself at this most dastardly insult!

He writhed, his muscles stood out in great knots, his bulging eyes gave out a terrific and scorching gaze, while his tightly-set teeth were plainly disclosed by his drawn lips. Panther-like was the aspect of the chief, and the blood spurted from his wound in a crimson spray; while his black steed, frantic at its master's struggles, reared and plunged, with wild snorts, its eyes flaming, and the foam flying from its mouth.

Cowardly bandits shrunk back in affright, while the captors, who guarded, and had by strategy captured the Seminole chief, fearing that he would break bonds, dropped the lariats that held the horse, and spurred away.

Like lightning a revolver sprung from the belt of Cortina, two sharp reports followed, and both the guards, who had failed in duty, threw up their hands, with yells of mortal agony, and fell from their horses upon the beds of the huge wash-out; one of them disappearing in the deep, narrow crevice, as his horse leaped wildly over it. Half a dozen bandits were overthrown and trampled upon by the terrified mustangs, as they plunged madly away.

And what about Sharp Eye, the Seminole?

No sooner had the lariats slackened, than the frantic black whirled, as on a pivot, and bounded like a shot through the camp; the ropes, by which it had been held, flying behind, free from the ground, in the terrific speed of the maddened animal.

Bandits were thrown to the earth, and the hundreds of hors s were stampeded, while the wild war-whoop of the Seminole rung through the air.

Cortina's camp was demoralized; the horses rushing madly, hundreds in number, up the huge chasms, making a thunderous din, while equipments and everything in their way, were crushed beneath the fast flying hoofs, that broke in pieces the bones of their overthrown masters! While on, in the rear, flew the black steed, its eyes blazing, and making noble efforts, after a long day's travel, to save its red master, from whose lips rung the loud war-whoop.

Yet, behind all, like an arrow shot from a bow, dashed a long-limbed racer, its ears laid back, and on a line with its spine, its nose pointed straight ahead, and upon its back sat Cortina, the Scourge; but no arm was in his hand, unless we may call a lasso such.

On he darted, with no visible change in that merciless face.

The noble black of the Seminole, with an intelligence that was marvelous, seemed to know the exact break in the massive bank, where was the mouth of the branching wash-out, that led up to the open plain. Up the same it darted; for the wild stampede had kept up along the bed of the huge chasm.

Five minutes from the start, the superb steed

dashed from the head of the little wash out, and out upon the open plain; and a wild yell of triumph burst from the lips of Sharp Eye, the Seminole.

He was now upon the broad prairie, and his noble horse would run until it dropped.

He had escaped from the destroyer of the maiden, who should have been his squaw, and he would yet have his revenge.

But while this thought filled the chief's brain, a hissing rope shot past him, and the noose of a lasso fell over his mustang's head.

A sharp twang followed, as the raw-hide tightened, straight as a bar of iron, and Sharp Eye and his faithful steed lay upon the plain.

The Seminole chief was terribly shaken and bruised, his horse lying partly upon him; but, by a superhuman effort, he raised his head and body, as much as was possible, and turned his glaring eyes backward over his panting horse, that choked, and breathed with a hard dry sound.

As the chief thus gazed, he saw his most hated foe, Cortina, seated upon his mustang, and calmly igniting a cigarette.

With his features contorted, in most furious hate and rage, Sharp Eye yelled:

"Dog! Son of a sneaking Coyote! The Bad Spirit waits for you, and he will not wait long. The Good Spirit has whispered in the ears of Sharp Eye, that Cortina's spirit comes not from his rotten carcass to the happy hunting grounds beyond the moon. Cortina was a fool. Sharp Eye, alone, bound arm and leg, has slain many of his sneaking yellow dogs, and scattered his mustangs through the wash-out and mesquites. "It shall be his death-song. Sharp Eye spits in the face of Cortina—Sharp Eye the Seminole!"

"Get your death-song ready then, for you will soon sing it. Cortina could have put a ball in Sharp Eye's brain, as well as in the cowards who showed themselves unfit to live, by being frightened by a Seminole. Bah! It makes me sick.

"You stirred my camp up more than I intended, but it's all right. I gave you the run for exercise, and I had an object which you will soon know. Cortina likes not to exhibit his modes of revenge to his men. Come, we will take a ride together—Cortina, El Rancho, and Sharp Eye, the last of the Seminoles, who are soon to be in want of a chief!"

As the bandit began to speak, he urged his horse forward, leaning from the saddle, and loosened the ringed lasso. Soon the black horse struggled to his feet, and the scratched, bruised and wounded, but undaunted warrior—once the red prince of the Everglades—and Cortina, the Scourge of the Rio Grande, both rode, side by side, over the plain toward the river.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE UNFINISHED DEATH-CHANT.

SHARP EYE and Cortina rode over the plain in silence for some time.

Had not the horse of the Seminole been greatly weakened by a fatiguing day's march, and the grand efforts it had made to escape from the chasm, where the bandit's camp was situated, to the plain, and its frantic fright since its second capture, the rope noose might have broken his neck; but the outlaw chief had now slackened it, not wishing to kill the animal.

It was sunset at the time of the attempted escape, but a bright moon rode high in the heavens, and as Cortina and the Seminole rode toward the Rio Grande, but a mile from the place of capture, the plain was nearly as bright as day.

Cortina, upon taking to horse for the pursuit of the chief, had ordered Juan Peres to take charge of the camp, restore order, recapture the stampeded horses, and get ready for the night ride.

This order was necessarily given in a hurried manner, as was also the one that none were to follow him in the chase of the Indian.

The bandit leader rode slowly along, placidly smoking his cigarette, and holding by the lasso the subdued horse of the Seminole.

Sharp Eye although having suffered torture from his bonds and his wound throughout the day, and though he had been cruelly forced through the thorny branches of the chaparrals while on the march, besides suffering from his horse's having fallen upon him when lassoed, still sat erect and undaunted; his spirit, in place of being in the least broken, was made stronger from the wrongs and torture, and taunting insults, and his recapture increased his intense hatred, and furious longing for revenge.

His arms and legs were swollen by the tightly jerked thongs when he had been brought to earth.

His black eyes still blazed as before, and were still fixed upon the dastard who, as he believed, had crushed, polluted and sent to her death dishonored, the bright flower that he had hoped to have worn in his heart of hearts.

The same implacable, indomitable resolution to cut his enemy to giblets ruled his soul, although there was not now the slightest hope of his so doing. He well knew that some of his braves would follow his trail—the trail of his

captors—and lose their lives in attempting his release.

This troubled him most of all, for but sixty of his tribe, men, women and babes, were left alive of all who, at the subjugation of the Seminoles in Florida by the United States, had refused to live under the flag which they had battled against so bravely for seven long years, and had settled in Mexico. Of these Wild-Cat had been the stern, brave and daring chief.

Cortina spoke not a word.

At last the clear, ringing voice of the chief, so noted at the council-fire, broke out on the clear night air, like stones hurled by a strong hand against some mighty rock:

"Dog of the chaparrals! chief of coyotes and coward back-stickers! You, who tread, crush under your craven heel the fairest roses the Great Spirit has put upon earth—look!

"Sharp Eye, the Seminole dares you! Look up to the bright moon of silver the Great Spirit has put in the sky to brighten dark places and to make cowards like you crawl into holes in the earth, from shame.

"Look, and know that Senola, the Star of the Seminoles, is a star near that moon, and she will shine when your carcass has been rotted in a slimy lake, shunned even by the alligators—when your spirit has been tortured in the dark pits of the Bad Spirit!

"Sharp Eye, the Seminole, can sing his death-song with joy, for he knows this. The Great Spirit has sent a bird to sing it in his ear. He never tells a lie. Sharp Eye has spoken."

"Then the death-song is now in order," returned Cortina, "for Sharp Eye will soon be where the Great Spirit will not need to send a bird with any messages to him. But before you start your chant I'll inform you that you have been on the wrong trail. Juan Peres is the snake that stung Senola, the Star of the Seminoles.

The scratched and blood-stained face of Sharp Eye blazed in fury, for he knew, by the manner in which Cortina said it, that he spoke the truth. There could, indeed, be no reason or object for him to do otherwise under the circumstances.

Often had it been in the power of the Seminole to have killed Juan Peres, and his regret and rage now knew no bounds when he realized that revenge had been within his grasp and that only through a belief in Cortina's guilt had he allowed the real villain to escape.

They had now reached the margin of the Rio Grande; which rolled afar down the perpendicular earthy banks, two hundred feet below—its waters muddy, its current rapid. A thousand yards to their right, northward, was the Texas bank, of equal height from the water, forming a tremendous chasm that was grand to contemplate, but hardly so when one was in the position of the Seminole chief.

On they went, up the margin of the stream, not ten feet from its dizzy depths, until a point was reached where a scraggy mesquite tree, retaining its hold after a fall of the bank during heavy rains, now leaned over the terrible height, seeming to cling by its powerful roots in desperate terror, as if to prolong a miserable life, and delaying the plunge to death that was but a question of time.

The roots near the trunk were entirely bare, and the dark, murk water, far beneath, could be seen between the same rushing rapidly.

The tree was unusually large for its kind, taking the place of growth into consideration, being some six inches in diameter, and about twenty feet in height. It was old, its branches were mostly gone, and but few of those that remained were alive.

Not only did the tree stand thus, but even the bank within which the roots clung, projected beyond the general line on either side; probably from the fact that no other trees were in view, either up or down the river, and the roots of this had prevented as much of the earth from falling as had in other places.

Upon reaching this point, Cortina at once dismounted, his horse standing docile, and the fatigued animal upon the back of which Sharp Eye was bound, just in its rear, with hanging, listless head. Without hesitation, the outlaw chief, with the slack of the lasso, the noose of which was around the neck of the black steed, sprang to the mesquite, and stood upon the very roots, between which could be seen the dark and rolling waters, two hundred feet below.

The tree swayed and trembled; but coolly the bandit passed the coil of slack around its trunk. He then sprang backward, and firmly attached the end of it to his saddle-horn.

Sharp Eye had detected the object of his captor; but it was beyond his power to make the least effort to escape the fate prepared for him.

Cortina held the lasso which was around the neck of his fagged steed; and, even were this not so, he could not, tied as he was, arouse the animal to flight—at least, not to a speed that would enable him to reach any distance before he would be once more captured. So he sat stoically, and gazed upon the proceedings; wondering that the Great Spirit did not cause the tree to fall while his detested foe was upon it.

This, however, would have left but a slight

possibility open, that he himself would not be dragged over by the fiend, who was about, not only to cheat him out of his revenge, but to take his life.

Mounting his horse, Cortina now spoke, as he turned in his saddle:

"Sharp Eye, you forget the death-song!"

The Seminole chief gave one contemptuous look—a look of undying hate—into the eyes of his foe, and then turned his face skyward.

All hatred, all contempt, all desire for blood now vanished. From the lips began to arise the monotonous death-chant of his tribe, sounding weird, and solemn, and unearthly on the night air.

Slowly the horse of Cortina stepped forward, the lasso tightening and drawing. Slowly the head of the noble black steed was drawn around toward the river; then, with its noble burden, it was forced to walk down, step by step, to the fatal mesquite tree.

One snort of terror, one toss of the head, as the horse felt danger in the quivering roots, and saw the terrible depths below; but that was all. The noose choked him onward—onward to a horrible fate—himself and his master, whose death-song arose louder and louder, as the animal neared the trembling tree.

At length the nose of the horse touched the trunk, its neck elongated, its fore hoofs were on the edge of the last turf over the roots.

He could be drawn no further.

Then Cortina dismounted, loosed the rope from his saddle-horn, and advanced, hand-over-hand, holding the same stretched. The fiend then secured the slack quickly about the horse's hind legs, which were braced forward firmly to prevent a nearer approach to death.

Still that weird chant sounded out over the awful chasm, and as the bandit knew the Indian would neither speak nor listen to him further, he sprang from the quivering earth and thence upon his horse, spurring at headlong speed toward his camp up the stream.

Had he looked down the river along the trail, he would have seen six horsemen with flaunting feathers upon their heads, lashing their mustangs at terrific speed toward the tree; for they being on the trail, had seen him and darted like the wind toward the point that he had just left.

On they came, their paint-daubed faces bent forward, the flying manes of their mustangs whisking their faces; their eyes, from out the daubs of vermilion, blazing with vengeful fury, thirst for blood and an insane longing to cover the ground between them and the tree.

This was shown by their hissing quirts, cutting the air and the hams of their animals at every bound.

Beaded buckskins and silver trinkets together with their arms and the shape of their moccasins show that Sharp-Eye's braves have been true and faithful in their pursuit.

But will they be too late?

When they arrive at a point where the sound of the death-chant reaches them, the wild war-cry of the Seminoles bursts with terrific and agonizing force from every red throat. Knives are jerked from scabbards and jabbed into the sides of their mustangs—the poor animals, with snorts and great bounds, reaching the edge of the quaking bank, and seeing the slowly-sinking trunk of the mesquite almost pointing to a level with the Texan shore beyond the river.

Gods! What a sight!

A noose lasso is around the waist of one in an instant and the other end of the lariat secured to the Seminole's saddle-horn, while he flies, knife in hand, through the air, upon the snapping roots.

His blade severs the bonds that are about the limbs of his chief, freeing the latter from his horse, and he hurls the blade from him and clasps his waist. Then down goes the noble black, with a scream that was almost human—down with the mesquite and tons of earth—down, down, one dusty mass, whirling into the boiling waters of the Rio Grande, and plunging from human sight forever.

But now, on firm ground, amid a half-dozen wild-eyed, panting, war-gear'd steeds, stand their six masters, Indian braves, and there is a seventh, blood-smeared and scratched, his arms gone, his eagle-feathers crushed, but his mien is proud and dauntless. His form is as erect, his black eyes as piercing as ever.

Sharp Eye, the Seminole, is saved.

His red warriors were guided by the Great Spirit, and Cortina, the Scourge of the Rio Grande, is balked in his game.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PLOT OF PERES.

JUAN PERES succeeded in getting the camp of Cortina in order before the return of the chief from his fiendish work of condemning Sharp Eye.

As the big "wash-out" in which the camp was situated, and up which the horses of the bandits were stampeded by the war-cries of the Seminole chief and his galloping steed—the chasm terminating in a steep ascent which stopped the stampede—and the bandits who

had stood near Cortina, and might have stopped the general havoc, had they not lost all their presence of mind, now feared his anger, this tended not a little toward the speedy readjustment of affairs.

The dead were removed, and also the broken arms and equipments, such as could not be repaired at once; and, as there was an ample store of others to replace those that had been broken, there was no serious difficulty in the way of having things put "ship-shape."

Consequently, when Cortina rode down the little branch wash-out, he found his band all equipped, and standing with arms over their saddles, and ready to mount at the word.

The extra camp appointments were packed upon mules, and dispatched to the secret retreat of the band, which was up in the mountains. An escort of half a dozen men accompanied this.

Cortina sat his horse at the entrance to the big "wash-out," glanced over the array—an imposing sight by moonlight—and then waved his hand to Juan Peres. The chief then whirled his horse and returned up the wash-out, without manifesting any interest in the proceedings, which were no less than starting his band on a most hazardous expedition.

The interest was to come when on the Texas side of the Rio Bravo.

Ten minutes after, nearly four hundred desperate bandits, described in detail in a preceding chapter, were flitting, like prowling wolves of the night—as they were—through the mesquites, toward the Reonosa Ford, beyond which was Texas.

Once across, and down toward Brownsville, through the chaparrals, which extend the entire distance, they encamped to await the following night, complete their plans, and divide into bands of different number, Indian-like, to commit their murderous deeds, of which the reader can have but a faint conception.

This programme was carried out; but it is our province now to follow Juan Peres.

About the time that the scout, Bill Mann, was in the vicinity of Resaca de la Palma, on his way to Colonel Ford with dispatches; in fact, galloping on the plain, in the rear of Captain Gaines, Juan Peres, with half a dozen of the villainous followers of his chief, was advancing down the edge of the mesquites, but within secure distance from observation on the plain that forms the northern chaparral of the Resaca.

Juan had brought his detachment of a hundred men to a point twenty miles west from where we find him, and there divided them into squads of six or ten each, sending them by different courses, not far apart, toward the Resaca de la Palma.

Not for a moment had he allowed the one grand object he had so recently formed to slip his mind, even in the camp of Cortina, when Sharp Eye, the Seminole, had so affrighted him; this being, for the reason, as we know, that he, and not Cortina, was the proper object of the Seminole's vengeance.

Since he had met the young Englishman, Percy, in Matamoras, he had been beside himself with joy; and when Cortina informed him that he purposed sending him to the Resaca, he had been wild with exultation, for this would give him an opportunity to murder the Englishman, who was now, as he knew, in Brownsville.

Consequently, as soon as Peres parted with Cortina, he dispatched two of his most trusty men, who were indebted to him for great favors immediately to Brownsville; one to inform the Englishman that a girl, answering the description of the one he was in search of, lived on the Resaca, below the northern road, the other to offer as guide to Percy, and then to murder him in the chaparral.

Upon his arrival in Cortina's camp, the latter acting upon his advice, had dispatched two picked men to Brownsville, to find out all that they could in regard to Colonel Ford's plans; and also to ascertain if the ruse which was to be played on Captain Donaldson would prove successful.

That is, if a scout, sent by Donaldson, would report with dispatches, and if those dispatches would be such as they desired; namely, such as would have the effect of drawing Ford, and the rangers and scouts in Brownsville, up the river, to the assistance of Donaldson.

But, to return to Juan Peres, and his further plans.

He intended that, if his men succeeded in luring Percy out, and murdering him, he would then, after the expedition, ask the favor Cortina had promised; and that would be, that he might absent himself, with a dozen men, to abduct a girl in Texas, and then have the support and assistance of his chief in a marriage with the girl. This was the plan of Juan Peres; and so eager was he to ascertain the result of the plot to kill the Englishman, that he resolved to advance down as far as the cotton road, and even as far as the spot where it had been planned to perpetrate the murder.

The party who were to co-operate with the assassin proceeded along the south side of the Resaca; but Juan's duty was to be on the north,

and there to command and direct the parties who were to attack the different camps of the returning planters, who had disposed of their bales in Brownsville.

His men were now in all directions, hiding until the cover of night should conceal their movements, and favor their nefarious work.

Having made these explanations, we return to Juan Peres, who, as we have said, was on the border of the mesquites, for the purpose of spying out the plain. The coming of any force of rangers from San Antonio, a very reasonable supposition of his that such might be the case, was a contingency to be provided against; and such parties might be expected to come in view on the plain, aiming to encamp on the Resaca the coming night.

Much to the gratification of Juan Peres, he discovered the well known scout, Bill Mann, galloping over the plain; and as he knew that Bill had been seen in the vicinity of the Reonosa Ford in the morning by one of his spies, he at once jumped at the conclusion that the ruse of Cortina, proposed by himself, in regard to drawing Colonel Ford from Brownsville, had been successful, and that Bill was now bringing dispatches.

This greatly elated Juan Peres.

Had he not believed this, he would at once have hastened to the road with his men; for every Mexican hated and dreaded the scout, and had shot at him more than once to no effect. This had caused them to believe that he bore a charmed life.

Juan Peres saw the cotton wagons, and the ambulance: but these were of interest to him, only so far as to lead him to hope that the owner would sell out, and return in time for him to "corral" the proceeds.

Having discovered Bill Mann coming from the right point, although by a different route from that which he would have supposed the scout to take—having seen this, and no rangers in view, Juan was satisfied, and drew back toward the shades of the Resaca, there to rest his men and horses in the dense thickets until the darkness should descend.

Little did he dream that Goldie Gaines was an occupant of the approaching ambulance, or he would have been almost insane with delight; but the fates ordained—or the devil himself—that Peres, the bandit, should that evening be the most madly-joyous man on earth; bringing untold misery and sorrow, such as words cannot express, upon the hearts of those whom we know.

Night fell, and Juan advanced down the Resaca, but cautiously, and in a path near the ash-bordered shore, his men following in single line, when suddenly he discovered through the mesquites the blaze of a camp-fire.

Halting his men, Juan dismounted, and proceeded with caution until he gained a secure place of observation, on the border of the little "open" in which the fire was burning. He then perceived that the two wagons and the ambulance he had seen on the plain were the ones now before him. Then he gazed toward the fire where an old man, a boy and a girl were enjoying their evening meal; but the latter was on the opposite side of the fire, and the form of the man being between him and her, he was prevented from seeing her face.

However, Juan Peres cared not for this, as he had no interest in any female on earth except one. All the same, he kept his post of observation, and cursed the worthless party for having forced him to make a detour to gain the road.

While the outlaw watched, the old man arose and walked to one side, when the very eyes of Peres bulged, his teeth became set, his hands clutched at the thorny shrubs and closed around them—for verily the wretch began to believe that a curse was on him, and that he had seen a ghost.

Never was a human being more astounded; and as Goldie Gaines arose, the firelight revealing her, and Juan realized that she was flesh and blood, he choked, gasped for breath, and then, utterly dumfounded by the avalanche of good luck, crawled back on hands and knees to get a distance from them in order that he might not betray himself. The bandit was almost literally beside himself with joy and exultation.

To see the face that had been constantly in his mind since he had met Percy, and the plans connected with it; to see that face there in that lone camp and in his power, was most infernally, overwhelmingly fortunate—more so than he had dared to hope.

But it is useless to dwell further on this.

Suffice it to say that Juan Peres watched the camp, took advantage of the absence of Captain Gaines and his son—and it was fortunate for both of them that they had left the camp, for they would have been shot like dogs—and taking one of his followers with him, removed the bale, took Goldie out tenderly and without awakening her. The poor girl had so recently been assisted thither by her father and brother that she probably believed them to be moving her again; and the fatigues of the day's ride had caused a deathlike slumber.

The bale was replaced, and poor Goldie was

borne away slowly by dark paths, still sleeping, in the arms of Juan Peres, the miscreant lieutenant of Cortina, the Scourge of the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER XVI.

LITTLE LIGHTNING IS TOO FAST.

GOLDIE GAINES, as a matter of course, did not remain long in the deep slumber that wrapped her; she had been in rather close quarters in the cotton-bale inclosure, and the cool night air along the Resaca side was decidedly damp; besides the motion of the steed caused her to become conscious that she was being borne away in the arms of some one—she supposed her father.

However, she, in her half-somnolence, realized that something must be wrong, or he would not be moving her from the camp, and she opened her eyes.

She was at once wide awake, for she soon perceived that she was in the arms of a man who was on horseback, and was traveling slowly through thickets.

Branches brushed her face, and at once she knew that something must have happened that threatened danger, or her father would not be traveling on horseback.

These thoughts passed rapidly through her brain, and then she called out anxiously, but in a low voice, for she reasoned that if danger threatened, she must not betray them by her voice.

"Papa!" she said; "oh, papa! what has happened, that we have started this way in the night?"

This in a rapid manner, and in a mere whisper.

In an instant she knew that her life was in danger, for the man who bore her dropped the rein, and the next moment a wad of buckskin was thrust into her mouth, thus effectually gagging her. At the same time the horse stopped, and her wrists were then firmly bound.

Words cannot picture the horror and anguish of the poor girl.

Ten thousand thoughts rushed like wild-fire through her brain, and her heart beat wildly in her bosom.

Whither could she be going?

Who had her in his arms?

Where was her father and her little brother? Had the camp been attacked, and had they both been slain?

Such were the questions that she put to herself, and the possibility—ay, the probability that the captain and Gerald were killed increased her anguish and horror. It was providential for her that, in her weight of terror, her senses left her.

Juan Peres had gone over a very short space of ground with his fair burden when she awakened; and but a little distance further did he travel when he ordered his men into a dense thicket, near the trail which led parallel with the Resaca, at a point where the same was for some length free from trees, and where any one passing might be seen from his covert. The latter, he deemed, was secure enough for his purposes.

This was an act of prudence on Juan's part, as he reasoned that an immediate pursuit would be made, and he wished the pursuers to pass him, thus giving him not only the advantage of knowing their number, but of being able to move successfully, evading them, as they would go on for an unlimited distance, keeping up the search, while he could branch off and seek a secure hiding-place.

He knew that the man and boy had gone down the Resaca, and that they would not go far and leave the camp. He reasoned that they had gone to visit another camp; consequently, there might be quite a force to start in pursuit of him.

A cunning villain was Juan Peres.

Not long had the bandits been concealed when a man came galloping like a fiend up the trail, and even Juan's face paled to see how Captain Gaines looked. But when the Englishman, Percy, came also at headlong speed in close chase, the bandit and his followers thought that the very fiends had broken loose, and piously thanked the Virgin that they had thus prudently acted.

In spite of his blood-stained face and the kerchief bound about his head, Juan Peres at once recognized the Englishman, whom he had met at Matamoras, and was filled with the utmost astonishment.

The appearance of Percy proved to the outlaw that his plot had been partly carried out, that his followers had lured the stranger out from Brownsville on the wild-geese chase after the golden-haired girl, and had attempted his assassination. It was evident, indeed, that he had been shot, but in some strange way he had escaped them, and not only this, but he had really been within but a few minutes' time of coming up with his cousin, the lost heiress.

This fact was so astounding that it nearly took away Juan's breath, for he was very superstitious.

It was most remarkable that he himself, who had resolved to gain the girl by capture on the ranch near Oakville, after the present rail

should be over, should happen upon her on the Resaca de la Palma.

It did seem that the Fates had ordained that she should fall into his power.

It was most amazing that he should have plotted to kill the Englishman, and through that plot had been the means of leading Percy directly to the prize which the latter was in search of—that he had been about to be brought face to face with his lost cousin, probably through the wound received at the hand of one of his own followers, and then it was so little short of miraculous that Goldie Gaines should have been captured by himself.

Juan Peres was so dazed by this most singular chain of events that for the time he did not even think of congratulating himself upon his good fortune, but his train of thought, which was instantaneous, was broken in upon by the onward galloping of another horseman up the trail, and Juan at once recognized the youth whom he had seen in the camp with Goldie Gaines.

And now came another most singular occurrence which caused the bandit to become once more dumfounded.

At this point there was a branch trail that led north, and the youth, who was undoubtedly in chase of his father, Captain Gaines, whom Juan had recognized in the lead, mad as a March hare, became uncertain which trail his father had taken, and brought his mule to a halt, his boyish face the very picture of intense anguish and unspeakable and deep perplexity.

Instantly it had occurred to Juan Peres, upon seeing the lad, that, in his future plans, he could make use of the youngster to great advantage, for Goldie, no doubt, loved the boy devotedly.

Juan felt positive that the youth must be the son of the captain, although he did not recollect ever having seen or heard of him.

He would not have been liable to take notice of a lad like this when he was at and about Oakville.

The outlaw was, however, soon made sure of the boy's paternity, for the poor fellow, utterly broken—and probably more to vent the grief and anguish that were breaking his young heart than aught else—cried out aloud, in the bitterness of his soul:

"Oh, father! Oh-h-h, father! Oh, Goldie, Goldie, where are you?"

Then raising his face heavenward, he once more called out:

"Oh, God! Lead me to Goldie!"

Previous to this last cry Juan Peres had given an order to one of his followers, in a low whisper, and while Little Lightning was thus crying out in despair, a blow from the bandit's carbine knocked the suppliant senseless to the earth, the mule bounding into the air with affright, and poor little Gerald Gaines fell like a clod.

Having been all the day in harness, the animal was not unwilling to halt at the pull of its youthful rider at the rein, and had fallen into a sleepy condition, or the bandit would not have been so successful in his dastardly deed.

Little Lightning was brought into the thicket, and again, as on many former occasions, he and Goldie were stretched side by side; but, alas! under what different circumstances.

But the most heartrending part of this event was, that poor Goldie recovered consciousness about the time that Gerald rode up, and heard his agonizing outcries for herself, and for his father.

The reader must be left to imagine the anguish of mind of the poor girl, whose young heart was to be still further tortured—even again to blissful insensibility—for she heard the cruel blow, and the heavy fall, and knew that the brave and noble boy had been felled to the earth, that gay, and joyous, and loving little Gerald Gaines, whom she had petted from babyhood, was dead!

But no, kind reader, she knew it not; for she did not retain her senses long enough to comprehend it. God kindly and mercifully called her to the quiet sisterland of death.

And there, in that dark thicket on Resaca de la Palma, amid outlaws who were as merciless as tigers of the jungle, lay that golden-haired angelic maiden—a waif of the sea, but heiress of almost untold wealth in merry England; and, by her side, lay the boy whom we have described—a lad, as free and fearless, as gay and joyous, as ever trod the fair earth—both reared in one peaceful home of mutual love and trust.

While afar, a gray-haired father, his brain crazed by grief, anguish and despair, galloped at headlong speed, and tore through chaparral; his eyes fixed on some invisible object ahead—staring for one look at his golden haired darling, the loved and worshiped angel of his house and heart.

And while the young, much wronged, and much endangered pair lay thus, there passed by, within twenty yards of them, those who would have battled like fiends to save them, who would save them from a score of such as those who held them captive—none other than Bill Mann and Old Rocky.

How oft does Heaven's justice sleep!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DOVE AMONG THE HAWKS.

"Dog my cats, Bill! Pull yer critter up an' listen a minit' ter my gab. This hyer thing air a leetle too billious fer this ole rawhide ripper."

"I never felt so dang'd puserlanimous mean since I war hatched. Jist ter rumernate on ther fac' thet thet air purty leetle gal war tuck by ther yaller-bided pepper-eaters, an' snaked from thet squar' o' cotton bales ter nowhar, when we-uns warn't more 'n two shoots off, makes me sick 'nough ter puke up my knee-pans!"

"I've bin so dang'd aggerwated an' hyderphobic ther last mile, thet I shot out my 'nigger-head' terbac' an' bin, chawin' my tongue ever since, an' spittin' blood. I feel es though I hed a lost orphib-a-huntin' hisself, er es though I hed gi'n somebuddy four bits ter knock ther top o' my kerbase off an' gi'n my brains a leetle air."

"I feel es though I'd like ter sock my huffs inter Bufler Bayou an' low ther alligators ter cut my toe-nails, es though I'd like ter hev a lousy, greasy Piute squaw nuss me an' feed me with stewed dorg, au' hash'd snakes, without pickin' out ther bones."

"Anythin' fer a change, I'll sw'ar! Thar's blue streaks runnin' up an' down an' criss-cross an' circlin' an' comin' ter a pint in ther biz part o' my 'natermy. I'll gi'n yer two picayunes, er a yaller dorg, er a gotch-eared mule, ter take me by ther huffs an' sock me head-fust inter some bog-hole, leavin' my legs out fer ther buzzards ter squat on arter a hefty feed o' rotten rattlesnakes!"

"Hold on, Old Rock! Fer ef yer goes any furdur wi' yer consarned gab, I'll feel woss nor I do, an' git down from my critter, crawl 'roun', chaw grass an' sw'ar thet I'm a mule, an' then yer won't hev no pard."

"Dang ther chalk aig my ole gran'marm used ter sock under her settin' hen! Don't yer do thet, Bill, er I'll go plum' lunnyfied. I'll chaw my nag's ears off an' ride back'ard, ef yer doesn't take thet gab back, swaller hit, an' arterwards take a box o' blue piles!"

"I'll try my bestest to act es though I war nussed on honey an' never war weaned. I've thunk ther hull biz over, from P'int Is'bel ter ther nor'wes' corner o' ther Pan Han'le, an' I sw'ar I can't git a squar' sift o' things. Why in thunderation won't yer stop yer critter an' hev 'nother council talk?"

"Hold on! Dang hit, thet's too short a stop! My nag 'll chaw yer critter's tail off."

"Hoo-ray, Ole Rock! I've gut ther hull thing!"

"Yer doesn't tell me, Bill! Wa-al, I'll take a chaw er terbac' now, dead sure, an' see what yer hes ter spit out. But I sw'ar, pard, ef yer hasn't somethin' cl'ar o' brush, I'll jark my six an' blow yer eye-ha'rs off!"

"Dang hit, Ole Rock! Doesn't yer 'member thet knife what war throwed inter Collins's whinly?"

"Wa-al, I ain't so fur gone es thet. Ya-as!"

"An' thet hit hed a paper onter hit, on which war writ, 'Veve Cortina?'"

"Ya-as."

"An' thet hit war throwed in when Ole Rip read ther dispatch I fotched from Don't's'n?"

"Ya-as."

"Wa al, I smells a hefty ole kiote. Ther cuss what throwed thet slasher war afeard Ole Rip wouldn't go fer ter help Don't's'n, an' he slung ther steel wi' ther paper onter hit, an' Cortina's cog onter thet, ter r'ile Ole Rip, an' thet-er-way makin' a dead sure thing on gittin' ther boyees outen Brown."

"Ole Rock, sure es my handle's Bill Mann, Cortina air a-goin' ter make a dash on Brown, while Ole Rip an' ther boyees air up ter Reonosa."

"Whoop-er-eel! Now fer biz! Dang my heart ef we-uns bain't gut ridin' to do ter save ther burg! We'll cut 'cross country on a wile stompede, fer we-uns can't resky Goldie ontill daylight, an' I opine she's nigh onter Brown wi' some o' ther cusses what's goin' ter run in on ther burg. Does yer see, ole pard?"

"May ther speerit o' Davy Crockett double up an' corkscrew me inter Tophet, ef yer ain't kerrect! Whoop! Spur like dangnation, an' I'm right 'longside, brush er brier!"

The reader will probably, have no difficulty in deciding the exact position of these two characters in our realistic drama. We may say, however, that we left Bill Mann and Old Rocky, but a short distance from the camp of Captain Gaines, on Resaca de la Palma; and, as it was utterly absurd for them to entertain the thought of tracing, or trailing the abductors of Goldie Gaines, or Little Lightning and the pair of wild riders, Captain Gaines and the Englishman—as this was impossible, it will be seen that they were, as their language implies, in no enviable state of mind. But we have seen that the ever acute and detective-like brain of Bill Mann saw a signification, in a slight event, that was of vital importance; and his reasonings and his conclusions were a credit to his sagacity.

Juan Peres waited such a length of time, as he thought would allow the two scouts to get a safe dis ance. He then prepared to make his way, with his captive, toward the Government

road; which runs up and down the Rio Grande, through the chaparral.

Fearing that his captive might die, from fright and horror, he had bathed the bruised head of Little Lightning, recovered the youth, and allowed the brother and sister—Goldie having been restored to consciousness—to be brought together, and to converse freely; although their hands were tied behind them. The relief and joy of both may be readily conjectured.

Upon each of them promising to make no outcry on the march, Juan did not gag them; and bidding one of his ruffianly followers to take the youth up before him in the saddle, Juan bore Goldie in his arms as before, and although the poor maiden was filled with the most intense loathing and horror, she was comparatively happy, for Gerald was with her.

They were both greatly relieved, the youth preferring to be a captive, rather than that his sister's whereabouts and condition should be unknown to him; and the brave little fellow bent his mind upon studying out ways and means of escape, although entirely ignorant as to where they were, or what their destination was.

Both well knew that they were in the hands of Mexican bandits, without doubt the merciless followers of Cortina, of whom they had heard so much; and both were tortured in mind, outside of their own sad and perilous condition, in regard to their father. For Gerald had informed Goldie of the captain's insane departure from the camp, in search of her.

They feared he would be killed, and neither of them had the slightest hope of aid from him, indeed they would much rather that he did not discover them, as it would be certain death to the grief-maddened old man.

Goldie was weak, faint, fatigued, and utterly broken in mind—nearly wild from the anguish, horror, and dread through which she had passed—but, Little Lightning, now that he was with his sister, was more like himself, and endeavored to gather hope as each mile was passed; thinking, that, at daylight, there might be some opportunity of escape, or a chance of their being rescued.

After reaching the more open mesquites, where the moonlight revealed to them the villainous visages and murderous appearance of their captors, they were filled with horror, and had little hope; in fact, they began to believe that they were to be murdered, although this, upon afterthought, seemed unreasonable, as the ruffians would have killed them at once, on the Resaca, had such been their intention.

The bandits spoke not a word during the march; and, as they were troublesome burdens, both could not help thinking that the object of their capture was strange and mysterious.

Mile after mile was traveled, passing through dense chaparrals, openings, tracts of cacti, and small mesquite-locked prairies, until at length they entered a dense thicket by a narrow path, passing through almost total darkness for some distance, but eventually emerging from the same into a circular opening. This last was about half an acre in extent, quite clear of bushes or cacti; but surrounded by an impenetrable wall of thorny and dense chaparral.

Here the captives were seated upon a blanket; the horses of the bandits, with the exception of the one that had been ridden by Juan Peres, were divested of their equipments, and lariatied out to graze.

A fire was then kindled, and food was cooked, of which the captives were given a bountiful supply. Juan Peres ate hastily, and then giving earnest and peremptory instructions to the six bandits, he prepared to leave.

As Goldie had perceived that he was the commander of the outlaws, she felt that, during his absence, their lives would be in more danger; for he seemed superior to his followers in every respect. The poor girl so informed her brother, who at once burst out in a hasty and fearless manner:

"Look here, Sir Bandit—for I reckon that's your biz, or you would not have sneaked into my father's camp, and stolen my sister! Where are you going? Why have you brought us here, and what do you intend to do with us?"

"My sister and I want to go back to camp. This thing is a mystery to us. Please explain!"

"Do be so kind," added Goldie, in a pleading voice, while her eyes filled with tears; "do be so kind as to allow us to return to our poor father? He will be insane with grief—indeed, my little brother informs me that he is now wildly searching the woods for me."

"Why have you torn us from him? As you hope for mercy, release us! For the dear Lord's sake, allow us to depart! If you ever had a sister, think of her, and imagine her in my place. Do let us go, I implore you!"

This was spoken vehemently, and in a manner and tone that would have melted a heart as hard as the nether mill-stone.

"I go; but I shall return, I think, before morning," replied Juan Peres, as he gazed in gloating admiration upon Goldie Gaines; "but, as to my allowing you to depart, you are too fair a bird to lose, after having been caught at so much trouble and danger."

"I have taken you from your father because

I love you, and have loved you since I first saw you in Oakville."

At the name of their home, both the youth and the maiden started; even the words of the bandit were searing their hearts. Then Gerald spoke:

"When did you see us in Oakville, and who are you?" he demanded; his face lighting up with fury and indignation.

"Don't ride so high a horse, my boy," advised Juan, "or he might 'buck,' and throw you so flat that you would never rise. I command here, and your life depends upon your words and manner. My men will cut you to pieces, at a nod from me. I will answer you, however. I was in Oakville one year ago!"

"I asked your name," said Gerald, more humbly.

"And I answer. It is—Juan Peres!"

"Oh, my God, protect us!" exclaimed Goldie, as she threw herself forward, her head on the shoulder of Little Lightning; the latter turning as pale as death, his lips trembling with emotion, and his tongue clinging to the roof of his mouth.

Juan Peres, with a fiendish laugh, sprung upon his horse, galloped to the dark wall of chaparral, shot into the same, and disappeared.

Gerald and Goldie were alone with the six villainous-looking cut-throats, who hated Texans with a hatred that was furious and bloodthirsty; but now, the hopeless pair feared these men less than the one who had just left them, and whose hellish laugh still sounded in their ears.

Hope had fled the hearts of both.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PURSUERS AND PURSUED.

WHEN Captain Gaines plunged into the most furious madness, and almost hopeless despair, galloped headlong from his camp on Resaca de la Palma, with insane desperation, in quest of his idolized adopted child, he flew up the narrow trail that ran parallel with the water-course, and directly past the thicket within which lay his darling, senseless, and a captive to Juan Peres and his gang; rode thus, closely followed, as has been shown, by "Stan'-ther-Press," or Percy, the Englishman.

Captain Gaines had no knowledge of the country whatever; but his one idea was to overtake the abductors of Goldie, and in his insane mind—for he could not be called sane—he had decided and with good and sufficient reason, that the miscreants who had bereaved him had gone up the Resaca.

Certainly they had not taken her down the stream, as that was impossible, the scouts and himself being in the only trail leading in that direction; and other points were impossible, one by water, the other by impenetrable chaparral.

The knowledge he had just gained, that the Englishman had a legal claim upon Goldie, as a relative; that her parentage was known, and that she was of high degree—for so at least he had understood it from the words of the man who had come with the scouts—infuriated him; and this, added to his prostrating anguish and bitter grief at her loss, completely turned the brain of the old man, and rendered him a most terrible person to contend with, or even to reason with.

His one aim now was to regain possession of Goldie, and to fly where the Englishman would never find them; and if he once thought of Little Lightning, he reasoned that his son would stay with the wagons, and that the scouts could care for him.

On and on he flew, tearing at times his flesh with the twigs that, filled with torturing thorns, overhung the trail, but he felt them not.

On he went, totally unconscious that any one was in pursuit of him.

And on, also, on the same trail, and close upon him, flew Percy, in hot pursuit, fully as determined, to the full as desperately insane on one point as captain Gaines. And that was the finding of the long-lost cousin, for whom he had searched so faithfully, and whom, by the merest accident, he had gained tidings of—ay, and had been within two rifle-shots of, just as she had been stolen by Mexican bandits.

Having been lured to a spot where he was led to believe that he would find one answering the description of her for whom he searched—lured thither for the purpose of murder and robbery; and after defeating the plans of the plotters, being rescued by the scouts in an unexpected manner, and ascertaining then that she really did exist, and had, within a short time, reposed among the very bales against which he reclined—all this seemed so mysteriously providential that he believed he had been divinely led to the point, and had been thus directed and favored in his aim of justice. But he now saw himself tried, in the same mysterious way; the object of his searching being removed a little further, thus placing a few more difficulties in his path, but only that his final success might taste the sweeter.

Thus did Percy, in his disordered brain, reason with himself.

He had at the start determined, as soon as he

ascertained that Captain Gaines was the adopted father of the long-lost heiress, that he would respect the tie that was between them, and in everything have regard for the feelings of the old man who so loved Goldie, and whom she, in turn, probably loved as well.

Then, when he saw the captain spring upon his horse, seemingly in madness, seeming to think that he had come to take Goldie from his arms to tear her from his heart, Percy felt deeply wounded, and resolved to follow and disabuse the old man's mind at any hazard.

At the same time he would assist in the search, recover the golden-haired maiden from the outlaws, who had attempted his own life but a short time previous.

At all events he resolved that he would overtake Captain Gaines, if his horse was equal to the task, and prevail upon the old man, if possible, to return, and with the more practical scouts, make a systematic search.

And thus these two men sped, one after the other, through dark and light places, until suddenly, on ahead, Captain Gaines discovered a number of horsemen in the sparse mesquites. These were galloping in the same direction as himself, but more slowly.

He knew that they were Mexicans, and that was sufficient; and with a revolver in each hand he darted upon them before they were aware of his presence. In among the squad he flew, the fire of madness in his eye, the thought of Goldie in his mind, and that these men, or their fellows, had stolen her.

They had no time to draw weapon ere the crack, crack, crack of the old man's revolvers sounded on the night air, and they fell like dry reeds before a "norther," while the horses of the slain, with snort and bound, shot away here and there into the sparse mesquites, with terrific bounds.

Clear through a half-score of bandits the old man flew, then whirled his steed to face his foes; but there were but four of them left to cope with him.

At these he went, and all spurred to meet him, firing as they came; but the Greasers, apparently, were so terrified at the fall of their comrades and the mad and desperate look of the man or devil that had so suddenly launched himself upon them, that they were unable to use their arms effectually. Two more of them went down, but the horse of the old man carried him beyond the survivors, and they dashed spurs to attack him in the rear before he could turn his horse.

But at this critical moment "Stan'-ther-Press," the Englishman, with blood-stained kerchief on his head, tattered and bespattered with gore from his opened wound, appeared upon the scene, revolver in hand. Down went both bandits, just as Captain Gaines turned his steed and saw his peril—saw, too, that he owed his life to the Englishman, who had come to claim his darling Goldie.

The firing had been heard by another party of bandits near at hand, who now opened into view in the mesquites; but they were discovered by Percy, who yelled, as he shot down the bandits at the rear of Captain Gaines:

"Load up! load up, captain, or we are done for!"

And load they did, and with rapidity.

They then started headlong at the ten Greasers who had galloped toward the scene of the fight; but as the new-comers saw the ground strewn with their dead comrades, and saw all this had been done by two men—men who appeared to be demons—they turned tail and fled; but the avengers of Goldie's abduction were at their heels, and four more went down before the yellow-skinned marauders scattered into a dense chaparral to preserve their lives.

Then the two who had ridden so far, one in chase of the other, rode up and met, and then gazed into each other's eyes.

Captain Gaines knew that the Englishman must have left camp a short time after himself and alone. He realized this, for the fight had served to relieve his brain somewhat from the terrible pressure. It was plain to him that this young stranger, wounded though he was, had immediately bounded into his saddle and followed him. And, equally as plain, that he would not have done this except through a genuine solicitude for him in his sad condition of mind, his bereavement, and his wild advance into a dangerous region alone.

However, he was assured of this fact by Percy's words, the latter saying, as he rode up and joined him:

"Captain Gaines, I am Stanley Percy, and I am positive that your lost golden-haired darling is my cousin.

"She is very dear to you, I am aware, and I think you and I ought to be friends and unite in the search for her. I hope you do not for a moment entertain the thought that I have the remotest idea of depriving you of one whom you have reared as your own. I have never dreamed of such a thing.

"The fortune that by right belongs to her has been left to me; but I have searched for her because I felt it to be unjust that she should not enjoy it if she were alive.

"I am an honest man, a gentleman, and my

actions in this matter ought to prove this to you—"

As Percy spoke the last words, he reeled in his saddle, and then fell to the ground.

But his horse did not leave the spot. The poor tired animal stood panting, but without any appearance of fright or inclination to run away.

Every word of the young Englishman went to the heart of Captain Gaines, and as the latter saw the speaker reel back and forth, he sprung from his own saddle to assist him, but too late.

The old man gave a heavy and remorseful groan as the body of Percy struck the ground, and then, holding the slack of his horse's neck-ropes in hand, he ran to the side of the prostrate man, knelt down and lifted the faint and bleeding head upon his knee. He then gazed down into the blood-stained face, all ghastly and the pallor of death where not so stained.

Captain Gaines trembled like a leaf, and the tears welled in his eyes, relieving his overtaxed brain.

This young man, it seemed, had crossed the seas to give to Goldie the riches that he might have retained and enjoyed himself, had he so chosen; but which he wished the rightful owner to have, if alive. And he, Captain Gaines, had fled from him, as if he were a leper; but, wounded as he was, this noble young man had followed him to protect him, to beg that he would join him in his search.

He had even suspected that this Englishman was the one who had stolen Goldie; that he had hired men to steal into the camp and abduct her—he, the noblest of the noble, by intention and by action.

He had saved his life by galloping all that long trail, through the torturing thorns; doubtless suffering great pain from the long and tedious ride, and now he might be dead, or at the least dying.

He had spoken words that cut him to the heart; but now, still and silent, and pale, he lay, and this spoke far more cuttingly.

As Captain Gaines thus meditated, he groaned aloud.

What a night it had been of anguish, of agony, of torturing agony of soul!

"Oh, my God! Oh, Goldie! Oh, Gerald!" cried out the old man.

Then he sunk backward, the head of the senseless Percy upon his breast—sunk backward upon the sward; the moon smiling down upon the upturned faces of the two, so strangely, and yet so strongly positioned toward each other.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SCOUTS ON TIME.

"JAB spurs, Bill, fer I'm dog-goned ef I doesn't b'lieve ther cantankerous, yaller-skinned, pepper-eatin' back-stickers 'll git inter Brown, an' rake things slick an' clean 'fore we-uns kin sarcumvent 'em, by glidin' arter Ole Rip!"

"But, dang my ole palperator, ef I ain't a-thinkin' ther chap'rell wolf 'll smell a large kiote, an' turn tail on 'em. He ain't a-goin' ter linger Reonosa-way, arter he an' Don't's'n cleans up ther leetle batch o' yaller bellyuns what's thet-a-way. Ef we-uns c'd git ter Brown, an' shake out ther cit'z, w' shot shooters an' sich, keepin' ther condemned scum o' Mex' from lungin' inter ther burg, ontill Ole Rip runs down, an' butts slap-dab ag'in' 'em on ther back, we'd lay 'em out thicker 'n ticks on a chap'rell mule's neck!"

"Thet's ther game we wants ter lay, ter play on ther yaller skuks, an' ef we-uns 'roves et ther Gov'ment road, straight 'crost from this, afore they bes skuted down, I reckon hit kin be played. I'm jist dead sure thet thet's Cortina's p'ogramme, clean through.

"Thar's a big sprinklin' o' Greasers scattered in ther chap'rell, Resaca-way, an' atween thar an' Brown; an' mebbe so, they'll all herd, an' jine ther big crowd comin' down trail. Ef they does, thar'll be a big rumpus, 'specially ef ther Wolf o' ther Chap'rell air at ther head o' ther biz."

The speakers, Old Rocky and Bill Mann, were riding side by side; but forced to go at less speed than usual, on account of being in the scattering clump of mesquites.

As the reader is aware, they were on their way, from up to the northwest of Resaca de la Palma, to strike the Government road, which runs, as nearly as possible, parallel with the Rio Grande, in order to do what they could to interfere with or prevent a raid on Brownsville by the Cortina bandits; they having decided, from various indications, that such a raid was intended.

"I'd be chuck full o' glad, Bill," said the old scout, taking a fresh chew of "nigger-head," "ter git a show ter draw bead on ther dang'd Chap'rell Wolf, with ole 'kill-skunk.' She never holds fire now, an' she gin'rally pukes lead ter ther spot. She's slung a heap o' blue pills inter red an' yaller meat, an' she never gits through hankerin' ter spit more.

"She's often worked me outen a double-bar'l'd see-ester by half-cockin' herself, when I hed no idee thar war a red bellyun within two leagues, er sich a matter; an' I never hes ter

stan' nosin' 'roun' fer reds when I bes her along."

"What yer done wi' her, Ole Rock?"

"I bes her 'cached,' pouch, horn, an' all; an' I reckon ef I doesn't show up 'fore another half-moon she'll git full o' hyderphobic, load herself up, an' go to shootin' all by herself, es long es ther ammunish' lasts.

"But, cuss my cats, Bill, I smells bleed an' buzzards—dang'd ef I doesn't! Thar's bin powder burned nigh hyer not long since, er I'm a puserlanimous perrarer pervaricator!"

"Dog-goned ef I doesn't 'gree wi' yer, ole boss! An' my nag shows signs o' opinin' ther same decish'. Jumpin' Jericho! Ole Rock, thar's bin a scrimmage, sure as shootin'. Jist gaze through ther mesquites yunder! Ef them ain't corpses I'm a liar, Mark yer 'six,' an' come on!"

"This ole raw-hide ripper ain't a-goin' ter foller, but I'm right with yer, nose ter nose."

Both scouts turned at this to their right, where, between the bunches of mesquites, could be seen the outstretched corpses of the dead bandits slain by Captain Gaines and "Stan'-ther-Press," the Englishman.

"Wa-al, cuss my cats, an' choke me fer a obstroperious settin' ben, ef hyer ain't bin fun on ther half-shell!" exclaimed the old scout, as the two reached the scene of the short but decisive fight. "A dozen corpses, an' nigh on ter every pesky one on 'em bored through biz without a kick."

The men had both dismounted, and were examining the dead.

"Ole Rock," said Bill Mann, "I'm opinin' thet this hyer biz war done mostly by one human."

"Ya-as; an' he made a break at 'em from ahindt. Hyer's four bored in ther back; an' ther way they lays shows plain an' pluin' thet, es yer spit out, one human cut right through ther party. Let's 'zar ine ther dirt."

Holding the ends of the neck lariats of their horses in hand, the animals snuffing the air and springing aside as they came near stepping on one of the ghastly slain, the scouts proceeded to examine the "sign" with great care.

"I doesn't like ter linger," remarked Bill, "when I'm on 'portant biz; but I sw'ar I'm boun' ter 'vestergate this hyer lay-out. I'd like ter pard wi' ther pilgrim what sent lead right an' left in this scrimmage."

"Hyer's whar ther high-fly shooter made a whirl, and headed back ter take in ther loose 'lefts," he continued, after a pause; "an' he made his critter stomp dirt lively, which he hed ter do er losa ther game."

"Ya-as; an', pard Bill, hyer's whar his pard come in an' took a han' ter help him out on ther deal. Whoop-er-e-e-e! Dang my gran'-marm's black cat, ef hit warn't our wild riders, Cap' Gaines an' Stan'-ther Press, I'm a Piute!"

"Reckon ye're right, Ole Rock. Fac' air I'm purty cussed sure it war; an', fer fresh pilgrims, they done some o' ther purtiest shootin' I ever seed."

"Come on, Ole Rock! Mebbe so we'll run ag'in' 'em. Le's run ther "sign" a leetle ways afore we jumps a critter-back."

Still with their horses in the lead, the scouts followed the trail quite easily, as the distance between the bunches of the mesquites allowed the moon to light up the sward. This was now moist, and as the horses of the captain and Percy were at speed, charging upon the second party of bandits, their hoofs cut deeply in it.

At a fast walk went Bill Mann and Old Rocky, soon discovering the four dead Greasers that had been shot of the second party.

"Wa-al, chaw me up, an' spit me out fer bad meat, ef they ain't ther most slam-up and simon-pure, XXX, A 1 trigger-pullers, fer 'freshes' I ever heerd tell on!" asserted the old scout, as he squirted tobacco-juice vigorously.

"Ef we-uns hed 'bout a dozen es wild an' brash humans, w' sich shootin' qualities, we'd make a beffy sprinklin' o' yaller-hided pepper-chawers claw dirt, in the course o' a sun an' a mejum bright moon. They're chuck full o' biz, an' hyderphobic on 'count o' ther leetle gal bein' tuck by ter back-stickers. They're on ther hunt fer Goldie, sure es ye'r born; an' they mean double-bar'l'd biz from ther word go!"

"Ya as, Ole Rock, they did," said Bill, in a peculiar voice, as he came to a halt; "but they've sold out an' gi'n up ther job, poor boyees!"

"Look yonder! Thar they bees, both on 'em, like ther babies in ther woods. Dang ef my heart didn't jump right up an' choke me when I seed 'em!"

"Thar's ther critters with 'em, too, which air ormighty strange an' onnat'ral like, I sw'ar!"

Both scouts now halted; Bill, as he spoke, pointing out Captain Gaines, as he sat supporting the head of Percy.

It was a strange and heart-stirring sight; and no wonder was it, that even the scouts, injured as they were to all manner of scenes of blood and border tragedy, paused in sorrow and heart-felt concern, fearing, and with good reason, that those who had enlisted their deepest sympathies the first part part of the night, and the heartiest admiration for their skill and bravery, now were dead.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DEATH OF A DOG.

But a very short time had passed since Captain Gaines had succumbed to the dreadful strain upon his brain. The reaction, when he realized the nobleness and self-sacrifice of the Englishman, and his own injustice—justice toward him—together with the belief that Percy was now dead, and Goldie gone forever—had been too much for him.

The position of the parties was sufficient to cause deep emotion in any one possessed of a heart; and the scouts approached slowly, as if they dreaded the investigation, as indeed they did.

The two men lay as described, as if dead; their animals cropping grass near them—the lariat, still grasped by Captain Gaines, preventing his horse from straying, and the other animal keeping it company.

"Dang my ole heart!" exclaimed Old Rocky, as he gazed at the sight before him, when Bill had drawn his attention to it; "ef thet ain't nough ter salerwate ther peepers o' a griz' b'ar! This air ther most condemned, cussedest night I ever see'd since I war hatched. Thet pore ole man hes hed 'nough essence o' Tophet shove'd ont'er him, all ter onct, ter make him wish he war decently kivered up under ther grass."

"I swan ter cristy, I'd rather feed on snakes a week than skute toward 'em. But 'Stan'-ther Press" stud hit a ormighty sight better'n I supposed."

The scouts soon reached the two prostrate men, who both appeared to be already dead.

Bill Mann, as soon as he saw the face of Captain Gaines, and discovered that he still clutched his lariat in his hand, had hope that he at least lived; and the young scout made short work of examining them both, when he called out to his pard:

"Pass yer canteen hyer lively, Ole Rock! I'm bettin' I kin fotch 'em both 'roun' ter biz."

"Thank ther Lord fer that!" exclaimed the latter, in great relief, as he acceded to the request. "Hit does my ole heart good ter know they hain't gone dead; fer they air both white men, from ha'r ter heel. I'm a-takin' my afferdavy on thet if needcessary, any time, with a strong appertite ter go through any dozen gerloots what 'sputes my say-so."

"How does the, pan out, pard, 'bout now? They hain't been shot, hev they?"

"Not a shute! They're both jist es they lunged outen camp. Hain't hed thar skin broke, 'ceptin' a few mesquite scratches; but ther Englisher's head hev bin bleedin' ag'in, an' be'd lost 'nough bleed afore. Hyer we air, Cap, all hunk, an' right side up wi' care! Ye're comin' 'roun' ter breathe biz lively, an' 'ginnin' ter shake yerself up."

"This ain't no time ter be layin' 'roun' loose in ther chap'rell; 'sides thar's a heap ter do in ther cuttin' and shootin' line."

"Whoop yerself up, Cap, ole boyee!" put in Old Rocky; for Captain Gaines had by this time, revived, and sat up in a dazed manner. But, recognizing friends about him, he pressed his forehead for a moment, to collect his scattered memory, and then catching sight of Percy, whose head Bill was bathing, all came back to him at once, and he cried out anxiously:

"Bill Mann, don't tell me that he is dead! For God's sake, revive him, if it can be done! He followed me, when he was badly wounded, and saved my life."

"Hyar he comes, Cap! Never mind; we-'uns'll make things lively yet fer ther cusses what tuck ther liddle gal."

"Don't mention her for Heaven's sake, or I shall go mad!" cried the captain, covering his face with his hands, in the extremity of his mental agony.

"Brace up, Cap!" advised Old Rocky. "Dang my cats! Shake up all ther vim yer gut in yer carkiss, fer hit's needed—bet yer last lingerin' picayune!"

"Thar's hefty biz toward ther Grande, an' we-'uns all is needed—needed bad. Stan'-ther-Press, how d'y?"

The Englishman had revived, and opened his eyes wildly, just before the old scout spoke. He then gaz'd from one to another of the party, and lastly at the captain; when a look of relief and pleasure spread over his face.

"Ole Rock!" cried out Bill; "prospec' inter Stan'-ther-Press's saddle-bags fer thet bottle o' whisk' we gi'n him on Resaca. Reckon he didn't gobble hit all down; an' ef thar's a hefty supply, we'll knock up pear and brash, in two skips o' a big-horns crupper holder."

"Whoop-e-e! Cuss my cats, ef he c'u'd ha' tuck a drink since I fust gi'n it to him!" exclaimed Old Rocky, joyously. "Hyar she air, nigh chock up. Lubercate yer in'ards, boyees! Jump critters, an' we'll glide; fer thar's humans in hefty danger yer kin bet."

Bill administered a big dose of whisky to both Percy and Captain Gaines; and, in five minutes all were in the saddle, and galloping toward the Government road, the scouts having made but a very short delay in their Good Samaritan attentions to the captain and the young Englishman, whom they complimented very highly for their skill and bravery in the fight with the bandits, near the place where they had been found by Bill Mann and Old Rocky.

OLD ROCKY, Bill Mann, Captain Gaines, and Percy, the Englishman, galloped for only a short distance; and then made their way, as cautiously as possible, for they were aware that they were in great danger of being pounced upon by a large force of bandits—or, at least, they had good reasons for supposing so.

They were nearing the Government wagon-road, the great and only trail up and down the Rio Grande; where the forces of Cortina must pass on their way toward Brownsville.

From the fact that the party of bandits whom Captain Gaines, in his mad frenzy, had, by almost a miracle succeeded in exterminating, with a slight assistance from Percy—both being crack shots, although unaccustomed to shoot at human game—from the fact that the bandits, before they were slain, had been heading for the Government road, and that another party had come to their relief, four of whom had been shot by the two Invincibles; this proved to the scouts, beyond a doubt, that they were on their way to meet, and to co-operate with a larger force.

Consequently Bill took the lead, being best acquainted with the chaparral paths; and, as soon as it was possible they gained a section which afforded the best cover to hide their progress and presence.

In a path that was barely wide enough for one horseman to travel, they proceeded, dense chaparral on both sides; and shortly after, arrived within a few yards of the road where Bill led the party, by a smaller side path, into a little "open," but sufficiently large to allow their horses to stand with comfort.

A short consultation ended in its being decided that Old Rocky and Bill, leaving their horses in the "open," should proceed to inspect the road, and ascertain if any force of the bandits had passed down.

The two scouts had set out for Resaca de la Palma, about an hour after sunset, and were at Jackass Prairie in half an hour after; and all the adventures through which they had passed, and the characters connected with them—all having transpired within an hour's time, counting up to the finding of their two friends in the senseless condition that has been described—seemed, as indeed they were, crowded into small space; for it was but ten o'clock at night, when Bill and Old Rocky struck the Government road.

It need hardly be said that horse-flesh had not been spared during that time.

And it must be remembered that the occurrences related as having transpired in the camp of Cortina, were on the night previous; the bandit having crossed the Rio Grande, and encamped in the chaparrals up the river, until he could perfect his plans, and form his plots.

The first of these was to advance a force against Donaldson; or to show such a number of men, at such a position as to cause the latter to bar their way, and hold them in check until he could send for reinforcements—thus drawing away all available forces from Brownsville, leaving the town unprotected.

The sending out of small parties through the chaparrals of the Resaca, was a plan to confuse the Texans; and these forces were expected to act as a reserve, or if a defeat occurred, to the main party, in that case they could scatter and all collect at an appointed place—thus forming a party of sufficient numbers to insure their returning to Mexico without danger of being molested on their way thither.

Each taking his lasso, the two scouts proceeded at once toward the Government road, leaving Percy and the captain in charge of their horses, and laying strict instructions upon them not to leave the spot.

In a short time the scouts arrived at the edge of the chaparral bordering the road, and viewed the same up and down, without showing themselves.

The coast was apparently clear, and Bill stepped quickly into the road, half-bent, examining the dust carefully, and passing across to the border of the chaparral on the opposite side. He was then satisfied that, as yet, no large force had passed down. He, therefore, raised himself erect, and started on his return at a quick pace; but he had not taken five steps when the hiss of a lasso caught his ear.

Before he could make a move, the noose encircled his neck, and he was jerked backward, flat upon the earth. He fell so quickly and violently that his head struck the ground, and he was stunned. The next instant, a villainous-looking swarthy Greaser bestrode the fallen scout, with glittering knife in hand.

The black, snake-like eyes of the bandit gleamed with hatred and triumph, as he raised his knife in the air, gazing in bloodthirsty gloating upon his defenseless foe, whom he doubtless recognized as one of the dreaded scouts who had slain so many of his companions in crime; and paused for a moment, thus exulting over his prowess, ere he buried his knife in the young scout's breast.

That moment of hesitancy, however, was probably induced by Bill's guardian angel; for

it gave Old Rocky the opportunity needed to save his pard's life.

Springing like a panther upon its prey, the old scout grasped the knife-wrist of the startled Mexican, as it was in the very act of descending, in his right hand, and the long hair of the bandit in his left, and forced the assassin upon his feet. He then whirled him about, face to face with himself, and holding him as in a vise, helpless.

Staring into the eyes of the dumfounded and terrified Mexican, Old Rocky twisted his wrist until the bandit writhed like a snake on coals of fire and was forced to drop his knife.

The Greaser was almost literally paralyzed with terror from the very appearance of the old scout, as well as by his Herculean strength; for as the latter changed his grip from hair to wrist, he held both wrists of the bandit firmly in his iron grip.

"Cuss my cats!" hissed Old Rocky; "I've gut yer dead sure, yer condemned yaller-bided pepper-chawer! Stick my pard, w'u'd yer? Wa-al, I sh'u'd go inter a conniption-fit out o' pure laugh jist ter think o' hit!"

"Le's see—I've sent 'bout fourteen hundred o' jist sich scum es yeou ter Tophet, but I'll swar they war all angels 'side o' yeou. Le's hev a fandang' fore I sen's yer ter kingdom come on ther whiz. I'm a ormighty 'commerdatin' ole rawhide-ripper, an' I'll gin yer a leetle amuse afore yer skips often this hyer yearth."

As the old scout spoke, he made an attempt at waltzing, whirling the horrified Greaser around wildly in the road, while the eyes of the wretched bandit bulged out in terror, his face ghastly as the dead.

During this improvised waltz, Bill Mann revived and sat up in the road, looking in a dazed manner at the singular proceedings. He soon, however, realized all, as much by the lasso about his neck as anything else.

He at once tore the noose off, coiled it, and hung it about his revolver-belt.

"How-dy, pard Bill?" asked Old Rocky coolly. "How does yer find yerself arter yer see-ester in ther road? Hit's a ormighty queer time ter repose yerself. I hes gut a cuss hyer ter interduck yer to. He's a high-fly sort o' a gerloot, but he hain't gut no wings."

"Reckon we-'unskin gi'n him a start up'ards, an' not ax a picayune fer it. Kinder sashay back whar we-'uns left ther boyees, an' I'll waltz my yaller-bided pardner thet-er-way. Reckon yer doesn't feel jist nat'ral, Bill, so yer kin meander without waggin' chin. Le's git!"

Bill Mann, although he realized everything that had occurred, was not a little confused from the terrible force with which the back of his head had struck the ground; and he at once plunged into the chaparral, at the point where he had left the same, Old Rocky backing his captive in the same direction, while he continued:

"Mebbe so, yer never craw-fished afore, an' hit's a ormighty onproperit time in yer fleetin' period o' lingerin' on this hyer big ball o' dirt ter start ter l'arn anythin', I'll 'low; but es hit's needcessary, yer must do ther best yer kin, an' we-'uns'll 'scuse yer ef ye're es ock'ard es a spavined mule."

"I knows dang'd well yer doesn't know nothin' 'bout 'Now I lay me,' but ef yer kin spit out somethin' what's calkerlated ter sof-soap ther devil an' git ther ole cuss wi' huffs an' tail woss nor a alligator—ef yer kin think o' somethin' thet'll sort o' influence him ter let up on yer a leetle fust off, till yer g's used ter ther heat, I hain't gut ther leastest objec'. So fire away, but make hit short, an' put in some consider'ble vim, fer yer kin spar' hit now ef any time."

"Hyar we air, boyees—Mex' an' me—'an' we're pards what holds tergether, yer kin jist gamble!"

By this time, Old Rocky with his captive had reached the little "open" where Bill had preceded him. The latter had drank a stiff horn of whisky, which had brought him around all right.

Backing the bandit into the open, the old scout remarked:

"Ef yer idees hes gut 'roun' ter biz, Bill, I'll turn this yaller cuss over ter yer. He's your meat, thet's a dead sure thing; but hit warn't only a bit ago thet he thort yer war his bacon, an' war perceedin' ter carve ther bestest part o' yer 'natemy."

"By ther way, did yer pick up his sticker what war in ther road? Ef yer didn't, hit mought gi'n us away."

"Ya-as, Ole Rock, I gut ther knife, an' biz lasso what fell in love wi' my neck; an' I reckon hit'll fit his'n purty well. Ole pard, I owes yer another life, an' I giner'ly pays my debts."

Captain Gaines and Percy were much amused at the old scouts' manner of taking and keeping captives, and were inclined to think that he might jeopardize their safety by his talk; but as Bill did not seem to object, they supposed that the scouts had good reasons for judging that there were no more Greasers in the vicinity.

The bandit trembled like an aspen leaf at the touch of human hand, as all cowardly assassins

do; when it comes to face death themselves, they are abject cowards.

No ceremony was gone through with. Bill Mann took the same lasso which the bandit-spy had cast, adjusted the noose around the neck of the trembling Greaser, who was then led to a mesquite on the border of the "open." The slack was then cast over a limb and all was ready.

"Does yer keer ter spoke, or pray?" asked Old Rocky.

"Whar's Cortina?" inquired Bill. "Yer mought git a few days' sport, ef yer'd spit out his exact locate."

The bandit said not a word, though it was evident that he understood the questions that were put to him.

"String him up, Ole Rock!" ordered Bill, quickly. "Thar's more o' ther scum not fur off—I know thet dang'd well."

The next moment the bandit swung clear of the ground, twisting and writhing; his brutal face contorted most hideously, his eyes protruding, his limbs twitching and drawing upward—a horrid spectacle!

CHAPTER XXI.

ON TO BROWNSVILLE.

OUR quartette of friends were, after the capture of the Greaser who had lassoed Bill Mann, positive that Cortina, with a large force, would soon come down the road, and that the bandit they had hanged was an advance spy, who had been sent down to reconnoiter.

Having gained the information required, he was probably waiting the arrival of the band to report, but had not dared to expose himself openly in the road for fear of being captured by some party of Texans.

The opportunity of capturing the scout having come in his way, he could not resist the temptation, and came to grief in consequence, being ignorant of the presence of Old Rocky in the chaparral across the road.

Percy, agreeably to the advice of the scouts, as soon as the "open" was reached, lay down to rest, and now and then braced himself from the flask.

Bill was soon himself once more, and with Old Rocky repaired again to the roadside, where they secreted themselves, just above the point which they had previously visited, and where, should any bandit discover the "sign" which they had unavoidably made, they would have the advantage.

So dense was the foliage that they could lie entirely concealed, on the very edge of the same, and gaze up or down the road, without danger of being discovered.

"Cuss my cats!" burst out Old Rocky, as he tore off a fresh quid of "nigger-head," then half-cocked his revolvers, one at a time, and revolved the cylinders over the palm of his hand to ascertain if the weapons were in order.

"Ya-as, cuss my cats, an' dang my dorgs! I'm gittin' tired o' this retail dicker. I'm eager ter jump my critter, an' wade inter 'bout a hundred or so o' ther condemned yaller skunks."

"We-uns bevn't hed 'nough buck ag'in' us ter keep up our appertite; an' ther pepper-chawer what we jist hung up ter dry didn't hev vim enough ter kick half es much es a cotton-tailed rabbit. He war ther wo'stest s'prised gerloot I ever see'd, when I got my grip onter him, an' waltzed him 'roun'."

"He hed ther deadwood on me, ef 'twarn't fer your bein' 'roun', pard," said Bill.

"Wa-al, I reckon he did, Bill. His sticker war a-flickerin' in ther moonlight, an' right over yer bestest bleed mersheen. Yer war right on ther edge o' kngdom come, pard, when I chipped inter ther leetle game, an' swept ther board. I allers tole yer, Bill, yer war too risky."

"Never smell 'roun' a bush thet's big enough ter hide a red er yaller, without hevin' yer peepers skinned fer a surprise party."

"I s'posed yer hed a bead on ther bush, Ole Rock, er I'd bin more keerful. Hit warn't ther fust rawhide thet hes bin slung et me by a Greaser—not by a jug-full. I ginerly slashes 'em wi' my bowie, an' then glides arter ther cuss that throwed bit; an' I hain't made many misses o' gittin' away with 'em."

"I tell yer, Ole Rock, thet Stan'-ther-Press air a game pilgrim. He's chuck full o' sand, an' so is ther ole cap'n."

"They're a hefty pa'r, when they're on the rampage, I'll 'low—mebbe so, a leetle too brash."

"They couldn't play the game they did, back yunder, many times, without gittin' tuck in outen ther wet. What in thunderation's thet? Jist listen! Ef I doesn't hear a heap o' huffs, trampin' dirt up ther road, I'll chaw bugs fer grub ther nex' six moons!"

"Ye're jist right, Ole Rock! They're a-comin' sure es shootin'. Lay low now, an' don't git yer snoot nigh yer terbac' pouch, fer fear o' sneezin', which w'd be calkerlated ter break up our biz, an' gi'n us a free send-off on ther long, dark trail."

"Don't breathe hard, er squirt juice!"

The acute and practiced ear of both scouts now caught the dull rumble of hundreds of

hoofs in the distance. To them the sound was unmistakable.

"Dod-rot my skin ef ther bull o' Mex' ain't a-comin'!" exclaimed Old Rocky, squirting tobacco juice most vigorously; "an' dang'd ef I ain't a-goin' ter spit, an' wink, an' breathe hard er soft, ef they air!"

"I calkerlates on makin' some on 'em chaw dirt, ef we're diskivered."

"Dang my heart, pard! They c'u'd't see us, no sort o' how; so keep cool, an' low yer ha'r ter grow," advised Bill Mann.

"I ain't used ter ther yaller bellyuns, Bill; but I'll sw'ar I wouldn't keer ter squirt hyer, ef a war-party o' 'Paches war goin' ter glide past. Cuss my gran'-marm's black cat's kittens! Hyer ther bees, fer sure, es thick es san' fleas ef P'int Is'bel."

"Sbet off yer gab'mersheen, Old Rock, er I'll choke yer! Dang'd ef I doesn't!"

They both now gave a searching look up the road, and saw a sight that would have appalled any man of less experience.

From chaparral to chaparral border, the road was filled with the villainous, merciless bandits of Juan N. Cortina; the Chaparral Wolf himself plainly seen in the rear of his red-shirted body-guard; who, a dozen picked men in number, rode in advance, mounted upon richly caparisoned, half-wild steeds, that cavorted and pranced, lowering their muzzles to the earth at times, and tossing their heads in the air. Their abundant manes were flying wildly, their bright eyes glittering impatiently and maddened to fury, when their masters but lightly pulled rein from side to side to avoid each other; the cruel Spanish bits, with their big rings of torture lacerating their tender mouths.

Gold and silver bound sombreros, silver-mounted saddles and bridles, glittering arms, and gaudy colors; all made up a pageant, to any except those who knew the character of the riders, that would have created the most intense admiration.

To the observing scouts, that body-guard, more than the common followers of Cortina, suggested cowardly murder, rapine, and robbery.

On came the low-browed, Indian-like devils, their black, snake-like eyes scrutinizing the chaparral on either side, their escopetas lying across their thighs, the small of the breech grasped in their right hands; while, in the rear, between them and the main body, rode Cortina, the Scourge, on the long-limbed racer, upon which he had so easily overtaken the black steel of Sharp Eye, the Seminole.

But he no longer appears indifferent to his surroundings.

Holding the rein in his left hand, his right is sustained near his revolver by his thumb being thrust under his belt, his pistol being drawn around in front of him on the belt, ready for instant jerking.

His piercing eyes wander suspiciously on all sid e, and it is evident that his every muscle is ready to be brought into play, electric-like, for energetic action.

But as the scouts look on in wonder, and before the bandits reach their covert, a horseman dashes from the mesquites near them, but down the road; and they know that he must have passed within a few yards of Captain Gaines and the Englishman.

This horseman no sooner breaks from the chaparral into the road than he half whirls the steed up the same, to behold the borders of Cortina and the escopetas of the body-guard bearing upon him—a dozen deadly tubes—but his face blanches not; for he rides toward them, raising both arms over his head, the finger-tips of each hand touching, thus forming an arch. The silent signal causes every carbine to drop, and the lone rider spurs through the guard to the side of Cortina.

It is Juan Peres, and he rides side by side with his chief, while he gives his report.

Thus they pass the hiding-place of the scouts, the piercing eyes of the advance failing to discover the Texans.

Then six abreast, thus completely filling the road, come the ruffian, reckless horde, cigarettes in mouth; low muttered song, and jest, and oath marking their passage, accompanied by the clatter of equipments, and the musical tingle and jingle of spurs and bit bells.

They are fully three hundred strong, and there are more in the chapparals of the Resaca to join them.

God help the people of Brownsville!

But, no sooner had they passed from view, than Old Rocky and Bill Mann sprung from their place of hiding, and tore through the thorns, toward the "open," both with anxious, but stern and determined faces.

"Cuss my cats! Dang my dogs! Dang my ole heart! Dang everythin' an' everybuddy, 'ceptin' we-uns!" burst out the old scout, in a comical mingling of perplexity, anger, and impatience.

"I'd like to chaw my own years off, wi' pure hyderphobic indig', ter see ther condemned yaller-bided pepper-eaters jist a-ridin' 'crost Texas dirt es brash an' airy es though they war to hum 'mong ther goats, jackasses, an' punkins. But, by ther bleed o' Davy Crockett, ther

Goliad martyrs, an' ther black-bean boyees, we'll take ther starch outen thet outfit, sure es shootin'!

"Somebuddy hes gut ter skute toward Brown, es fast es horse-meat kin glide, an' somebuddy's gut ter make huffs flicker up-stream, ter hurry up Ole Rip an' Don'l's'n. Reckon thet's ther p'ogramme, Bill?"

"Thet's jist what's gut ter be did, an' or-mighty speedy, without any extry slingin' ob gab," answered Bill Mann, at once, and in a decided tone. "I'll cut aroun' ther bellyuns, an' spur deep fer Brown; while yeou, ole pard, must skute up ther road."

"Cap'n Gaines, yeou an' Stan'-ther-Press hed better lay low an' rest yerselves, until Ole Rip comes jist a-kitin' down; then yer kin jine him, an' go in hefty. Ef I ain't mos' dang'ly mistaken, I knows ther cuss what's gut Goldie."

Captain Gaines had been lying outstretched upon the sward, groaning in anguish and bitterness of spirit, recalling the fact that his boy Gerald had been left alone in the camp on Resaca de la Palma, and that the poor lad would suffer untold misery, and agony of mind and heart.

Not only this; but the Greasers might murder him, and this thought, coupled with the torturing memories of Goldie, caused the old man to be almost beside himself, being in great danger of relapsing into that state of ungovernable and insane fury, which had marked his first shock upon discovering that his idolized child was gone.

But when Bill spoke in regard to believing that he had a knowledge of the miscreant who had stolen her, the captain sprang to his feet, and grasping the old scout by the shoulders, cried out:

"Bill Mann! For God's sake, what do you mean?"

"I mean," explained Bill, "that Juan Peres, the horse-thief thet used ter hang 'roun' Oakville, hes jist jined Cortina; an' he come from toward Resaca. Ef he hesn't gut Goldie 'cached, then I'll squat on a clump o' prickly-pear, an' roll until ther thorns swells my carkies es big es a bull biffer!"

"I see'd ther cuss, too," put in Old Rocky, "an' I puts hit up that he's bin ther boss o' ther Greasers what's bin rampagin' 'roun' on Resaca, fer he's a right bower o' Cortina's, an'—come ter rumernate on ther subjick—cuss my cats ef I doesn't opine thet Bill hev struck ther bull's-eye."

"Ef Juan Peres doesn't know whar yer leetle gal air, I'll chaw bugs fer grub ther nex' six moons. Howsomever, this hyer ain't no time fer council gab; fer, es ther Turtle, my red pard ther Tonk, 'u'd say, 'ther war-path's open,' an' dang my dorgs ef hit ain't a hefty ole war path this time!"

"Cap, keep cool until yer sees this ole rawhide ripper skutin' down-road with Old Rip an' ther boyees; then jine us wi' Stan'-ther-Press, an' I reckon we'll kerral thet Juan an' choke ther biz outen him."

"Bill, I'm ready fer a dash up-trail. Don't 'low ther yaller-bided pepper-eaters ter gobble yer up, an' git ther citz ter hold out until we 'roves."

While talking the two scouts had been equipping their horses for a hard gallop, and, without any further words, Captain Gaines and Percy, perceiving the great importance of their respective missions, refrained from troubling them with questions. With a "shake" all around, Bill stole through the chaparral to make a detour and get ahead of Cortina's forces, and then to gallop at full speed to Brownsville, while Old Rocky shot up the road to warn Colonel Ford of the invasion; but, as the reader knows, Old Rip was already aware of the extensiveness of the raid, or surmised that a plot had been perpetrated upon him, and he was now, with his rangers, dashing down the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER XXII.

PREPARING FOR THE FIGHT.

SIXTY bandits, who knew the nature of the land and the exact position of Captain Donaldson, as well as the number of his men, had been ordered by Cortina to advance up the river between the same and the belt of impenetrable chaparral which ran parallel with the Rio Grande.

Donaldson, with but twenty rangers, the remainder of his company being on a scout to the northwest from the ford, while on the march south had discovered the Greasers, and believing that they had been on a raid in the direction of Resaca de la Palma during his absence from that point, he determined to make a stand across their path and to prevent them from crossing into Mexico.

Not only this, but he resolved to send his most trusty scout to Brownsville and inform Colonel Ford of the situation, doubting not that his superior officer would, with his available force, dash up in the rear of the bandits, thus having them between two fires, effectually surrounded, and cut off from retreat.

In this event, he believed that the whole bandit force could be annihilated, and such would most undoubtedly have been the case had the

Greasers held their position. But such, as we have already seen, was not their intention.

The bandits remained until made aware, by their spies and scouts, that their ruse had worked, and that Colonel Ford, with his rangers, was riding in hot haste to reinforce Donaldson. Then, in small parties, they had departed, all meeting again in the camp of the main party, which was an isolated opening in the chaparrals on the north side of the Government road.

A small party, however, remained behind to keep up a desultory firing, in order to deceive Donaldson into the belief that the entire detachment was still in the same position, the scattering mesquites enabling these movements to be made without detection.

Colonel Ford set out from Brownsville in an hour after sunset, and in two hours and a half he joined Donaldson, the last of the Greasers having disappeared in the chaparral but a short time previous to his arrival. He, with his men, galloped over the ground that had been occupied by the bandits, much to the surprise and amazement of Donaldson and his men, who were on the point of giving them a volley, believing them to be a part of the Greasers who were making a charge on him; but a Texan yell from Old Rip's crowd completely dumfounded the rangers of Donaldson in the wash-out.

However, as has been shown, the nature and meaning of the strategy was seen at once, and all felt positive that Cortina was on the Texan side in full force, and that he meditated, indeed intended, an attack on Brownsville.

For this reason it was that the whole force of rangers, only about fifty in number, immediately galloped on the back trail toward the town, Ford's men stopping at a ranch a short distance below Donaldson's position, where luckily the ranchero had a sufficient number of horses corralled to give them all a fresh mount. This was much needed, as their animals were completely fagged with the long and rapid gallop.

Donaldson's boys took an easy lope until Old Rip and his men joined them; then they all went at a headlong gallop, four abreast, down the Government road toward Brownsville, filled with the greatest apprehension.

Full ten minutes were passed when, on ahead, Ford and Donaldson discovered a horseman coming toward them at terrific speed; who, even in the moonlight, by his style of riding—swinging his arms and throwing his legs outward while spurring—was recognized as Old Rocky, and a wild cheer of welcome burst from the rangers, all coming to a halt as the colonel threw up his hands in a signal to that effect.

The old scout slackened not his speed, but spurred on, bringing his panting, foam-flecked horse to a halt by a jerk when within five paces of Ford and Donaldson, the haunches of the animal almost touching the earth, and its tail sweeping the dust of the road.

"Cuss my cats!" exclaimed Old Rocky, in mingled relief and anger; "Ole Rip an' Don, I'm ornighly full o' glad ter run ag'in' yer. Ther hull o' Mont'ray an' Mat'moras part o' Chiwarwar, an' a sprinklin' o' ther City o' Mex' air skutin' towards Brown, wi' ther dang'd Chap'rell Wolf, Cortina, fer ter boss 'em."

"Thar's 'bout fourteen hundred an' forty-four o' ther dog-gonedest or'nary-lookin' yaller-hided pepper-chawers I ever seed, an' I'm bankerin' ter make a dash at 'em. But come on! I'll turn tail, I reckon. Dang my dorgs ef I ain't chuck full o' hyderphobic! I've chawed half a plug o' 'nigger-head' since I left Bill Mann."

"Where's Bill?" asked Colonel Ford quickly.

The colonel had listened with patience to the old scout, knowing that he would say just about as much anyway; and he knew the short stop would be a benefit to the horses, besides making no material difference in the events to come.

"Bill hev cut 'roun' ther bellyuns, through ther chap'rell, an' skuted et stompede speed ter shake up ther citz o' Brown, an' try an' make a stan' until we all 'roves. Ther condemned backstickers hev bin raisin' merry Tophet et ther Resaca, an' ther chap'rell's es full o' them es a Piute's head air o' bugs."

"The more the merrier," said Colonel Ford, with a stern and determined look, and a flashing of his eagle eye.

"If we can corral Cortina, this will be a great night in Texas history. Fall to the rear, Old Rocky, and get a fresh mount! The boys have two good horses in lead. Then you can ride up, and we will talk as we ride. Were they traveling fast?"

"Nary. Ther condemned yaller skunks war glidin' long easy-like and indpendent es though they hed a beffy mor'gidge on Texas, an' hed come ter close her up. Yer kin slash my hide inter saddle-strings, ef hit warn't tortur' fer me ter squat in ther bush, an' gaze at ther snake-eyed scum es they rid past!"

"But, I'll git now fer a fresh critter, an' j'ine yer later. I've gut two boss fighters hid in ther chap'rell b'low hyer, a couple o' leagues."

With these words, Old Rocky drew to one side, the command passing on, all giving the old scout a hearty greeting as they rode past him; he frequently giving them the news, by yelling it out in his peculiar manner.

"Big circus, boyees!"
"Heaps o' fun down b'low!"
"Thicker'n bugs in a Piute's head!"
"Yaller-hided pepper-chawers until yer can't rest!"

"Git ready ter pick triggers peart an' lively!"
"Ya'as, the chap'rell cock hev gut his gaffs on, an' air 'bout ter flop wing, an' crow, on Texas dirt!"

These, and such as these, called out Old Rocky to the boys, as they put their questions. But he was soon in the rear, and hastily transferred his equipment's to a fresh horse; allowing the animal he had ridden, free range. He then galloped close to the chaparral border of the road, on between the same and the rangers to the front.

All had been going forward at an easy lope; but, as soon as the old scout reached the front, Colonel Ford raised both hands in the air, put spurs, and the fifty rangers went thundering on toward Brownsville at headlong speed.

Not, in the whole wide world, could there be found an equal body of men, who could successfully cope with the Texas Rangers who galloped that night, to battle with a force six times their number.

Every man of them was inured to border life, seldom knowing the so-called luxury of a bed beneath a roof; their bed being Mother Earth, and their roof the star-studded heavens.

Skilled in arms from early boyhood; as well as to break a wild mustang, after capturing the animal with their never-failing lassoes, they were a force not to be despised.

Their food, the meal of the golden corn, the game of the prairies and the fish of the rivers, when in service, and the rich, tender, prairie-fed beef and mutton, when at the old ranch; always, however, when obtainable, the inevitable tin-cup of strong coffee, the best and most prized beverage of the borderman—they showed it in their clear eyes and wholesome skin.

Strong, muscular, quick of movement, long-sighted, and having a fortitude, a perseverance, and a vim, with "sand," born of prairie food and prairie air—such were the men who made up the corps of rangers under Colonel Ford, in the Cortina war. Such, indeed, were the Texan Rangers at all times; for none, except such men as we have described, could stand the service, and cover, if called upon to do so, sixty or eighty miles between sun and sun. After such a ride, it would be theirs to lie down at once upon the prairie, without ever thinking that they had accomplished any great day's work.

Armed, each with a Colt's carbine, or five-shot revolving rifle, and a pair of Colt's army revolvers, with the inevitable bowie-knife, these men, crack shots every one of them, feared not to charge a thousand, were they but a hundred strong, and mow their way through such a number they most certainly would. Had Old Rocky's exaggerated statement, in regard to the number of bandits Cortina had under him marching from Brownsville, been believed, or been actually true, those fifty Texas boys would have dashed on, just as joyously, just as daringly, and without the least doubt in their own invincibility.

And on they galloped, until at the point where Captain Gaines and the young Englishman were awaiting their advent. The latter now spurred out from their covert in the chaparral to the side of the old scout, who summoned them with a yell; and, as "Stan'-ther-Press," with the blood-stained handkerchief about his head, was discovered by the rangers, they gave a cheering yell that meant vengeance as well as greeting. Old Rocky passed the word down the line that Captain Gaines, who was known to many of them, had been camped on the Resaca, and that the Greasers had stolen his beautiful daughter, Goldie.

This, when it became known, caused outcries of fury and revenge and a gripping of weapons, which said, louder than words to the captains, that his wrongs would be most terribly avenged, and his daughter restored to him, even though she had been taken over the river into Mexico.

Indeed, there was not a ranger there present who would not have risked his life, over and over again, to rescue a woman from the power of the merciless bandits of Cortina.

Percy, as well as Captain Gaines, believed that the liberty of Goldie depended upon the expected fight—that if Juan Peres was captured by them, with the assistance of Bill Mann and Old Rocky, who knew the outlaw far better than did the captain—they could wring from the dastard the secret of her whereabouts and save her.

Consequently they were the most furious against the bandits, and proceeded with more bitter and vengeful feelings and reckless daring than any of the little band of heroes, for they had strong and personal reasons for such feelings.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SNARE IS BROKEN.

WORDS cannot express the utter hopelessness and despair that filled the breasts of Gerald Gaines and his sister after Juan Peres had revealed his name and his intentions to them.

Both knew him by reputation; indeed, there were few in Western and Southern Texas who did not, for his cowardly assassinations had been too many in a short time previous to his departure from the Lone Star State, for that State's good.

Men who had incurred his anger and animosity had been called to their doors at night, by his knock and appeal for hospitality, in an assumed voice, and then shot like dogs, upon their own threshold, he then springing upon his horse, which was but a lariat's length from the door, and escaping in the darkness.

Young and lovely Mexican girls, in many cases, had been lured from their homes, ruined, and then cast off, and, in one well known instance a beautiful girl, whose father was an American, and her mother a Castilian—the former being dead—had persisted in following him from place to place, pleading with him to make her his wife and not leave her to shame and disgrace. This girl he induced to don male attire, under the pretense of having her accompany him to a town on the Rio Grande, where he promised that the ceremony should be performed.

But her body was found in the chaparrals torn by wolves and buzzards, and with a bullet-hole in her skull, proving that Juan Peres, dastard that he was, had murdered the poor girl, after first blasting her young life.

All these things were well known, yet he succeeded, knowing as he did every foot of the country, in escaping, and he was quite an adept in disguising himself.

His mere look was pollution, and the mention of his name was enough to cause any maiden to shudder, or any brave man to instinctively grip his weapon—for the brave man is ever on the watch for a coward.

Such Juan Peres was known to be, and his character and crimes had often been discussed in the home of Captain Gaines. Consequently Goldie and Gerald knew him but too well, and no wonder was it that when they were made aware by the dastard himself of his identity, they shuddered in their very souls, and the blood chilled in their veins, for their captivity was no longer a mystery.

Well they knew that their father had led many a squad of men in pursuit of the ruffian, and that it was his boast that no man who ever hunted him escaped his vengeance sooner or later.

As has been mentioned, Goldie, after the departure of the merciless scoundrel, laid her head upon Little Lightning's shoulder, he sitting upon the sward, his arms bound behind him, in utter despondency, anguish and despair at the probabilities ahead for poor Goldie.

His thoughts were most torturing as she sobbed convulsively and looked down upon her wealth of golden hair, completely veiling her head and bust from view, as it lay in wild abandon, the silvery moon playing amid its meshes.

And as he thus looked upon her, the boy wished from his heart that she was at home with the angels—that she could be transported heavenward before being polluted by the foul touch of Juan Peres, the assassin and libertine.

And long sat Gerald thus, Goldie at length sobbing herself to sleep, like a little child, for she had suffered more than tongue could tell mentally, and fatigue now bound her frame as in iron chains.

Although suffering great torture from the cruel cord that bound him, Little Lightning did not move. He scarcely breathed, lest he should awaken Goldie, and thus bring her back to a knowledge of her situation. Moving from his position would have diminished his physical suffering, yet the boy sat silent—silent as if carved from stone—rather than disturb Goldie.

And, notwithstanding his perilous position, and that of his sister, his torturing thoughts and the pain in his limbs from impeded circulation, his lids grew heavy also; but, time and again, he threw off the feeling of sleep, resolved that for Goldie's sake he would keep awake and watch for, or at least think of, some plan of escape.

Upon the departure of their leader, the six ruffianly bandits whom he had left to guard the captives had attended to the animals; then, rolling their shuck cigarettes, had, with evident relief and pleasure, spread a blanket, produced a pack of cards, and then squatted upon the sward in the moonlight at some distance from Gerald and Goldie, and had plunged deeply into the mysteries of Spanish monte, without paying further attention to their prisoners.

It was evident to Little Lightning that these Greasers believed it impossible for him and his sister to escape, and he felt that they were right in that belief, for no possible opening or plan could he see, or conceive of, to break loose, much less to leave the place.

He resolved, however, to bear up and not give way altogether to despair.

While they were in Texas there was still hope of rescue, and as yet they had not seen the Rio Grande.

There was no probability that his father would discover them, for the poor man was distracted by grief and anguish, and besides knew nothing whatever of the country.

Doubtless he was now many miles away, and the youth recalled the fact that the Englishman who had come to the camp in a wounded condition with the scouts had galloped madly after his father.

"What could this mean?"

Was the Englishman rendered insane by the wound on his head? And had he pursued his father with evil intent?

All the events of the night were vividly impressed upon Little Lightning, and the thoughts he indulged in only served to bewilder him and cause him to doubt that there was any such thing, or virtue, as justice.

Old Rocky and Bill Mann, he thought, might possibly trace him and his sister through the chaparral; but it seemed impossible for them to do so by moonlight.

These scouts were the only hope to the poor youth, who fully believed that they would follow the trail in the morning; but then it might be too late. Before that time, Juan Peres might have taken them across the Rio Grande.

The moon rolled on, shining down into that island in the chaparrals—an oasis in a wilderness of thorns—shining down upon that brave boy, who, with the fortitude of a Comanche brave, sat stiff upon the sword, the tight-drawn thongs cutting into his flesh. Shining down upon that beautiful girl, whose breast rose and fell gently as she wandered in rosy dream-land, unconscious of her dread surroundings and prospective fate; and—thank God! she had this brief respite.

And the silvery, placid moon also illumined the dark, low-browed bandits, as they flipped the cards and cursed as their silver changed hands; their snake-like eyes glittering as they watched eagerly the upturning of the "pasteboards."

The cropping noise of the horses tearing grass from the sod; the hum of thousands of insects in that opening, walled in by dark thickets of thorns, which could not be penetrated by even a rabbit except at one point; the distant bark of coyote and the peculiar cry of the chaparral cock; these, with the dreamy, hot air, all conduced to sleep. But the eyes of Little Lightning were wide open, his senses on the alert, and he was the first to hear the approach of a horseman, coming by the same path by which they had entered, and at a gallop.

The bandits sprung to their feet, grasped their carbines, and one ran quickly to the entrance to the "open" yelling, as the night-rider approached:

"Who goes there?"

"A friend of his country," was the reply.

"Good!"

The next moment a Greaser urged his horse from the chaparral, and was at once surrounded by the six bandits, who evidently recognized him as one of their companions in crime.

A short, hurried consultation followed, interlarded with many vehement gestures; then four of the outlaws sprung to their horses, hastily equipping the animals and springing into their saddles, spurred from the opening; led by the late arrival, who was evidently a messenger from Juan Peres.

Little Lightning now saw a ray of hope; for he had noticed that the bandits while playing cards frequently drank from a bottle and the fumes of *mescal* reached his nostrils.

If these two would only fall asleep, and he could but work free from his bonds, then escape was certain; and he waited—oh, so patiently!—until at length he thought it would be a good plan to feign slumber himself. So he lay back upon the sword, although the position—his arms being bound behind him—gave him intense agony. Yet naught of this was shown upon his boyish face. He was, apparently, in the deepest sleep.

And thus the two bandits found their captives, after they had come from changing their horses. Then, after a short consultation, they rolled themselves in their blankets, and slept the sleep born of fatigue and intoxicants.

Out of the corner of his eye Little Lightning watched the two Greasers as they lay, and his heart gave a great bound of relief, for he had thought of a plan to free his hands.

He waited until he knew that the bandits were fast asleep. Soon the deep, long-drawn snores assured him of this.

Then he arose to a sitting posture, this time using no care in regard to disturbing Goldie, for he wished to awaken her.

Yet the poor fatigued girl slept on.

"Goldie! Oh, Goldie! Wake up, sis! Oh, wake up!"

Bending as near to the ear of the sleeping girl as was possible in his position, Little Lightning thus called her, but in a low voice, at the same time raising his knees up and down quickly. The maiden sprung upward, with a cry of pain; for the movement wrenched the cords that bound her, causing acute agony.

For a moment she gazed around in a dazed manner, her fair face contorted with amazement and dread. Then she was recalled to all that had occurred, and a sense of her perilous position, by seeing her brother, still bound, in front of her, and by his voice.

"Oh, Goldie!" exclaimed Gerald, in a voice that seemed full of hope and cheer; "there are only two of those Greaser devils here, and they have been drinking, and are now fast asleep."

"I have not slept a wink, Sis, for I have been watching you, and thinking of some plan of escape. Another scoundrel of a Greaser came a little while ago, and four of our guards left with him, on some new deviltry, I reckon."

"Now, Sis, we must get out of this. It is our only chance, and it is not a bad one. Do you, when I roll over, throw yourself flat, and gnaw the cords around my wrists. If you get one of them bit through, we are all O. K. Can you do it, Goldie?"

"Oh, yes, Gerald!" was the eager reply. "I will do anything that you suggest. But I am suffering terribly from the way they have tied my wrists."

"Do as I say, Goldie, and then I will soon free you."

Little Lightning rolled over, bringing his back and bound wrists uppermost. Then Goldie threw herself forward, though the pain caused by the movement was such as to nearly bring about a fainting-fit.

"Cheer up, Sis, and all will be well! I'll have those strings off you shortly, if you'll only do as I suggest."

The young girl turned her head, the wrists of her brother being near her mouth, and closed her sharp teeth upon the thongs that bound him.

In less than a minute, came a glad cry of joy and relief, and the youth jerked apart his wrists, and rolled over, sitting upright, and rubbing his bruises.

Then he tore away the cords from Goldie's wrists, a d ankles, and lastly proceeded to entirely free himself. Soon all that was accomplished.

Gerald and Goldie Gaines were free!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SLEEP OF DEATH.

LITTLE LIGHTNING and Goldie, when free from their bonds, found that they could not rise, nor even scarcely use their arms, they were so benumbed.

They at once proceeded to chafe their wrists, and the youth wondered how he had been enabled to loosen the cords from Goldie; but it had been owing to the heavy dew that moistened the buckskin, and rendered it softer and more pliable.

Both maintained the same positions that they had occupied when bound, for fear that the bandits would awaken and ascertain from their changed attitudes that they were no longer secure.

Although free from the cruel cords, they were far from being free in reality. The two Mexicans might awaken at any time; and Little Lightning realized that Goldie could not walk, and even if she could, they must, if they hoped to reach a place of safety, have horses.

Should they start away on foot, the two bandits would beat the chaparral on horseback; and as their weakness and lameness would not allow of their going far, they would most certainly be recaptured, and then probably Gerald would be shot down like a dog. Indeed, it was a mystery to the youth why he had been spared thus far.

"Goldie," he said, in a low cautious tone, "we are in a tight box yet, and these murderous devils may awaken at any time. If they do, it's all up with me. They'll kill me, I know; and I haven't even a pocket-knife to defend myself and you, with."

"Oh, Gerald! What shall we do, then?" cried the poor girl as she gazed with apprehension in the direction of the sleeping bandits. "But can't we crawl into the thickets and hide until morning; or at least until these wretches go away from here, thinking that we have escaped?"

"No, Sis; that would be impossible. We are surrounded by the thick chaparral. A snake would have a tough time getting through; and even if we could crawl in you would leave shreds of your dress on the thorns, and they would trail us."

"There is only one way to escape, and that is with horses."

"But, Gerald, in that case we should make so much noise that these bandits would awaken. Oh, what can we do?"

The maiden clasped her hands and began to sob.

"Goldie, don't!" expostulated the boy. "I was working myself up to calmness and coolness. Compose yourself, and allow me to recover my vim. By hooky! I'm not going to be beat, after we have gone so far. I tell you what it is; those Greasers have got to die!"

"Oh, Gerald! What do you mean?"

"We can't get out of this unless I kill those miserable devils."

The girl covered her face with her hands.

"Gerald, my poor brother," she said, at length, "our dread experience has been too much for you. You do not realize what you are saying."

"You are mistaken," said the youth; "I never was more square in the head than I am

now. And it's lucky that I am; for, just as sure as I'm sitting here, I'm going to kill those two Greasers. I feel like myself again, and I shall save you, or die trying."

"If Bill Mann was here he'd kill these bandits in two skips of a rabbit; and why can't I?"

"Goldie, you see that bush with the shiny leaves? Crawl to it, and you'll be in the path we followed to get in here. If I'm killed, crawl, or walk, or run—whichever you can, along that path, until you get to more clear chaparral. Then hide in some thicket, and stay there until you see the Greasers go away. You can then travel east, toward sunrise, until some one that is white shows himself."

"Hide whenever you hear any one coming, for fear it might be more bandits. Don't try to reason me out of this. It must be done, or we are lost. Go, Sis! For that devil, Juan Peres, may come back at any time."

All the time that Little Lightning was speaking his sister was clinging to his arm and weeping spasmodically, as though her heart would break; and the boy perceived that, if they were to escape, he must at once begin operations, disregarding her tears and protestations. He had thought much and earnestly, since the departure of four of the guard, of what he would do were he once free; and he well knew that escape was next to impossible without horses, and also that the chaparral swarmed with bandits.

During his short captivity the boy had become a man in judgment and resolution, if not in size and strength; the sufferings and prospective peril of Goldie quickening his ideas, and inducing him with a reckless daring that no danger could daunt.

He had made up his mind to kill the two bandits, or attempt it; and he was immovable in this resolve.

But poor Goldie seemed to have become bereft of all command over herself, appalled at what she considered madness in her brother, and her face was now filled with a terrible anxiety and apprehension that was painful to witness.

She already saw, in her mind's eye, her little brother struck to the earth. She saw the knives of the Mexicans flash in the moonlight, and then plunge into his young breast—he, whom she had loved and petted since his babyhood! Yet she knew that it was useless to reason with him. She knew that he would make the attempt, and also that any further show of her feelings would only serve to lessen his chances of success.

So she rallied all her strength, and composed herself outwardly as best she could.

"That's a good girl, Sis!" said the youth. "Do as I tell you, and I'll fix those devils so they'll never do any more harm; and I'll do it with safety to myself too, for I've thought of another plan since we have been talking. Can you walk, Goldie? It isn't but a few steps to the path."

The poor girl dared not trust herself to speak; but she arose with difficulty, and staggered in a manner that was painful to witness toward the trail that led to the "open." This was not only completely arched with the mesquites that arose above the dense chaparral, but was so narrow that the bushes on either side brushed against any horseman while passing along the path.

On went Goldie, all her strength being required to bear up under the weight of anguish and despair that had come so suddenly upon her.

On over the dew-sprinkled grass, the moon shining pitilessly down upon her—on, until the entrance was reached, when she sunk to the earth and crawled upon hands and knees into the dark shades, as if she would hide herself forever from the world—as if the horrors behind her were too terrible to look back upon. And yet a strange fascination forced her to turn about and gaze with glassy eyes, that were filled with a horrible and most torturing apprehension, toward the place she had just left.

And there, crawling upon his hands and knees, as slowly and carefully as a panther toward its prey, was her little brother, making his way toward the sleeping bandits, holding a lasso in his mouth.

Her very heart seemed to cease its pulsations, her blood began to chill in her veins, and her brain to become as molten lead, as Little Lightning approached nearer and nearer to the sleeping bandits.

She longed to cry out that she might relieve her overburdened brain, which seemed to be bursting; and she strove to do so, although she well knew that a single shriek of hers would condemn Gerald to death.

She could not help it, and she would, in the intensity of her feelings, have done so, but her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth and refused its office.

Not far was it from her covert to the place where the bandits lay.

Goldie could plainly see each movement of Little Lightning, and she stared like an insane person, her tears being dried up by the intensity of her feelings.

The youth at last reached the place where the Mexicans lay asleep, and without a moment's hesitation began operations by carefully working one end of the lariat, which he had found on one of the saddles, under the ankles of one of the outlaws—both having thrown off their blankets on account of the heat—then, when he had accomplished this, he tied the legs of the bandit firmly together.

The other end of the lariat he used in the same way upon the second Greaser, accomplishing his work in the same expeditious manner.

Crawling up to their heads he then, without awakening them, secured their carbines that lay by their sides, putting the guns out of reach in the grass.

He could now have shot both of them dead, but he feared the report of fire-arms might draw other bandits to the spot, so he resolved to kill the Greasers with their own knives.

This necessitated the most silent, slow and careful movements; for he was forced to draw the knives from their scabbards, at the belts of the sleeping men. But Little Lightning was equal to the emergency, and soon stood between the two sleepers with their knives in his hands.

His plan was now sure of being successfully accomplished.

The two bandits, the two villainous followers of Juan Peres, were at the mercy of this boy; but there was no mercy in his heart or mind.

The Greasers lay some two yards apart, and Little Lightning stood between them, a knife tightly clutched in each hand, every muscle strained for the fearful undertaking before him.

Calculating well his future movements, and the exact places to strike in order to reach their hearts, the youth bent to the right, raised the glittering steel in air, and drove it to the hilt in the breast of the first sleeper, leaving the weapon there. The next instant he had plunged the remaining *cuchillo* into the heart of the bandit to his left.

No sooner was this accomplished, than like a panther, Little Lightning bounded toward the carbines, as the most horrible yells filled his ears!

The youth turned, weapon in hand, and presented his face, pale as death, his eyes glaring with the most dread apprehension—turned to behold the two bandits staggering to their feet, and each grasping the handle of the knife that pierced his vitals!

They glared upon the boy like infuriated demons for a moment, and then stumbled about like men who had been blinded by dense smoke; beating the air with the disengaged hand, as if warding off the fiends who were torturing them.

This was for a moment only. The torture was too agonizing. The steel was jerked with their latest strength from out their breasts, and the hot blood spurted afar out over grass and flowers. Then, with horrid, gurgling yells of agony, the two bandits sunk to their knees, and then fell backward; the moon shining down upon their terribly contorted faces—the faces of men who had gone to answer for their many crimes!

"Hur-ra-a-a, for me!" cried the boy, as he ran to the entrance of the "open," the narrow trail, and parting the bushes, called out, cheerily:

"Goldiel! Everything is all O. K. We're as free as prairie air!"

No answer.

"O-o-oh, Goldiel!"

Filled with the deepest anxiety, Gerald now crawled into the dark thicket.

He could see nothing, but his hand soon came in contact with the form of his sister, lying outstretched upon the ground, and devoid of all consciousness.

"Poor Goldiel!" muttered the youth. "It has been too much horror for her to bear up under, and no wonder. I came mighty near wilting myself. Thank the Lord, it's over!"

With hasty step, Little Lightning returned to the camp, procured a gourd of water, and soon revived the girl, whom he then led out into the moonlight. Then he hurriedly equipped two horses, assisted Goldie upon one, sprung into the saddle of the other, and led the way out of the "open."

"Now, Sis," said the lad; "cheer up! I'm small, but I can take a Greaser out of the dew and not half try."

But poor Goldie had witnessed the whole of her brother's proceedings; fainting as the horrible death-yells of the bandits struck her appalled ears, and the scene and sounds impressed her with such dread that she remained speechless, and rode as one who had fallen into a trance.

She had barely sufficient command over herself to keep her saddle; and after passing the belt of dense chaparral and entering the more open mesquites, Little Lightning rode by her side, cheering her as best he could, and promising her that he would lead her to their father; although he had not the remotest idea where that father was.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON THE DEFENSIVE.

BILL MANN, if he had not known every crook and turn of the more open mesquite belts, and every cattle trail within and through the dense thickets of bush and cacti, could never have made the detour necessary to get ahead of the forces of Cortina.

As it was, he galloped here and there, making sudden turns, that would have unhorsed any one not accustomed to the saddle from boyhood, and at times forced his horse to bound over clumps of prickly-pear, the legs of the animal becoming filled with the torturing thorns of this abundant species of cactus. These thorns are barbed inward, toward their base, and work into the flesh, thus causing festering sores, which swell the limbs, and are the cause of great suffering.

But in the headlong gallop, with its blood heated, rendered frantic by the mercilessly driven spurs, the horse of the scout felt not the thorns, but bounded madly onward, soon being far ahead of the bandits, owing to a sweeping turn in the road.

Into this Bill guided his animal, and then, in long reaching gallop, with loose reins, and the forward pricked ears of the horse in a line with its spine—on it went, maddened into terrific speed by the long-roweled spurs that the young scout was forced to use without mercy.

This he regretted much to be compelled to do, for Bill, next to a well-ried human pard, loved a horse better than anything else on earth.

On between the walls of the chaparral, keeping in the middle of the road, his revolver at half-cock in his right hand, and his thumb on the hammer, the weapon resting upon his thigh, ready for a snap-shot in an instant's time, should a bandit spy spur from any of the paths which he at times crossed—thus on went the scout, fully realizing that life or death to many depended upon him and the speed of his horse.

On toward Brownsville, in the moonlit road, like an arrow shot from a bow went the noble steed with its noble rider, who had oft before ridden on just such missions; who had a hundred times risked his life for others, without a thought of self.

And so for an hour's time he galloped, his horse at length traveling with less speed, and seeming to take no notice of jab of spur whatever, but going in a labored, staggering lode, its breath coming and going in a hard, dry, rasping manner, while the white foam flew at every bound.

This was torture to the young scout, but it could not be avoided. His horse must be sacrificed, if necessary, in order to save human life.

But soon the town came in view over the low mesquites, and in five minutes Bill was dashing through the street, yelling like a fiend and shooting his revolvers in the air as rapidly as possible. On down the river-front, past the approach to the ferry, past the parade-ground and hospital, and then up the main thoroughfare, and to the left, to the plaza. There still hung the suspected bandit spy, swaying from the awning frame, opposite the establishment of Pete Collins.

And Pete had heard Bill's noisy *entree*, being up and out on the narrow sidewalk just in time to see the young scout dart into the southwest corner of the plaza and thence to the middle of the square.

There his noble steed seemed to know that it had fulfilled all that was required of it; and having spent its all of strength and life to fulfill its mission, sprung into the air with a moan that was almost human in its intonation, and then fell prone upon the plaza, the blood spouting from its mouth and nostrils, its great eyes glaring, and its whole form quivering spasmodically.

It was but for a moment, and then the head of the noble beast sunk lower and lower to the dust of the plaza.

Once it jerked up its head, and with its latest strength gazed with death-filming eyes into the face of its master—le standing by its side—as if for a word of comfort, as if to receive some token of approbation for duty well performed; then the graceful head fell, with a dull, sodden sound upon the hard ground of the plaza. The faithful steed was dead—its great heart ruptured!

And there stood Bill Mann, a revolver in each hand—his mission for the moment forgotten.

The tears were coursing down his cheeks, his overworked frame and brain causing him to tremble like an aspen, utterly broken by the affecting death of his noble horse, whose condition had been entirely overlooked through the thoughts of the danger that threatened the town.

The importance of his errand, and the excitement consequent upon the happenings of the eventful night, tended to cause the young scout to lose sight of all else, except the duty of warning the citizens of Brownsville of the advent of Cortina, the Scourge of the Rio Grande.

But the horse was now dead, free from all sufferings, and Bill dashed the tears from his eyes, reloaded his revolvers, and returned the weapons to the scabbards. He then proceeded

to remove the trappings from his dead horse, and while so doing Pete Collins came striding up to him, with a brimming glass of brandy, while he said in eager, inquiring tones, in which not a little amazement was blended:

"What in the dickens is up, Bill, that you ride that way? Dog-goned if you hain't killed as fine a horse as you or any other man ever straddled!"

"Here, pour down this brandy, for I know you need it. What's the matter Resaca-way? Another raid out there?"

"Thanks, Pete!" said the scout, dropping the clipped style of speaking that he always kept up when with Old Rocky—an exact imitation of his old pard's way of expressing himself. "Thanks! I do need a drink now, if I ever did, for I'm used up, as the death of my nag proves."

"He was a faithful, noble beast, and his death has affected me about as much as the death of a human pard would; but he's out of misery, and that's a comfort."

"As to a raid on Resaca, I went that way, I know; but I've been up-river since. Pete, you know I would not alarm the town for anything Resaca-way, but it's just this: Cortina, with three or four hundred of his cut-throats, are on their way to attack this town, and they will be here inside of an hour."

"Get me another mount, will you? And then yell until you split your throat. There ain't many fighting men in the burg; but if we can hold our own on the outskirts of the town for awhile, everything will be O. K. Old Rocky has gone for Ford and Donaldson."

"If Littleton and Matt Nolan were here we'd corral every infernal Greaser in the outfit, the Chaparral Wolf included. Hurry up, Pete, and order your man to bring me a horse, for God's sake!"

Pete Collins had stood open-mouthed, filled with the utmost amazement and apprehension, for Bill Mann had explained the situation in a rapid manner. But as he fully comprehended the peril of the town, without a word he ran across the plaza to his hotel, and awakening his stupid hostler, ordered the best horse in the stables to be taken immediately to Bill in the plaza.

As Pete disappeared into his bar, there was a rush of men and boys into the square from all points, all carrying arms of some kind, many without hats, and the faces of all stamped with bewilderment and apprehension.

Matters were soon explained by the scout, and the citizens, although less than fifty in number, who were able to face the foe, rushed back to their houses for ammunition, and that they might more effectually arm themselves and advise their families as to their action in the coming crisis.

The women and children, in their terror, rushed through the streets into the Government grounds, and from thence down to old Fort Brown, within the bastions of which they would be in safety from the leaden hail that was expected to pour through the streets and houses of the town.

The dwellings were close locked, and the citizens then congregated upon the plaza, where Bill Mann was now equipping the fresh horse that had been furnished him by Pete Collins.

The latter then opened his bar and treated all hands, while Bill Mann was elected commandant of the forces of the town by acclamation.

And Bill lost no time in perfecting the arrangements for defense.

He at once set men at work digging holes in the middle of each street that led into the town from up the river, and then obtained six kegs of gunpowder that a merchant of the place had on hand, the latter readily contributing the same as soon as he realized the danger with which his property was threatened.

A portion of one of these kegs was placed in each hole, and a hollow reed filled with the explosive thrust into it, and projecting upward to the surface of the ground. Then the hole was carefully filled in, and a train of powder laid from the reed to the nearest doorway, a hole being cut through the door to allow the projection of a pistol through the same by which the train might be fired.

The points chosen were near thick-walled *adobe* buildings, which bullets could not penetrate, these, too, having raised walls, some three feet above the flat roofs, upon which a half-dozen men were posted to fire upon the enemy below, as soon as they had been thrown into confusion by the explosion.

A man was also stationed at each turn of powder within the house, to fire the train when the Greasers charged into the town over the buried kegs.

Then appointing one of the men of each party, known to have been tried in times of peril, to take charge, Bill, with some fifteen of the citizens, took up their position on the roof of a house on the west side of the plaza, to protect the establishment of Pete Collins. Pete, himself, made one of this number, having armed himself with four revolvers and a double barreled shot-gun, charged heavily with luckshot.

This last arm was also carried by many of the citizens, it being a very destructive weapon at close quarters.

And thus, in less than half an hour after Bill

Mann's noisy entrance into the town, matters were arranged as we have described, everything being done that was possible to repel the attack of the bandits, and force them to act on the defensive until the arrival of the rangers under Colonel Ford and Captain Donaldson.

Not more than fifteen minutes elapsed, after these preparations were completed, when the forces of Cortina the Scourge were discovered coming slowly, evidently intending to enter the town, and gain good positions for plunder in different parts of the same, before creating an alarm, and never dreaming that they were observed.

To all appearances, every one in Brownsville was in bed and asleep, no person being in view, for Bill had given orders for all to keep shady until the explosion should open the ball.

On came the horde of yellow-skinned, merciless chaparral pirates, bent on rapine and murder, but little thinking of the reception that awaited them, or that the dreaded Texan Rangers were riding like the wind—coming to pounce upon them.

Little thought they that their plot, although it had succeeded so far as to draw off the defenders of Brownsville, had been rendered futile by two daring scouts and the sage reasonings and conclusions of Old Rip, the Chaparral Fox.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SURPRISE-PARTY.

At a slow walk the bandit horde approached Brownsville, through the sparse mesquites, in a wide-spread mass; dividing, at the orders of Cortina, into several parties, each forty or fifty in number, in order to enter the town by several streets. This was just as Bill Mann had reasoned that they would.

Slowly, holding their horses in check, they neared the suburbs, filled with exultation, and anticipating rich booty, with plenty of liquor. This would make up for past reverses, and revenge the hanging of many of their comrades in crime.

Cortina led his body-guard down the river front, toward the Government buildings; thus, as ever in his reckless career, escaping death by the skin of his teeth, so to speak. For, had he kept straight on, there were those watching him from a house top, with cocked guns, who were madly eager to draw bead on him—a very possible thing in the bright moonlight that prevailed—and the man in charge of the mine would have fired the same, even had none but Cortina ridden upon it.

Every party, according to orders, timed their pace that they might all enter the town at the same time; and the sight of these desperate villains, as they thus sat their horses, carbines in hand, was enough to appall the few Texans who manned the roofs. But they had grounds to hope for the best.

They felt positive that they could not hold the town long, but they knew Colonel Ford; and knowing him, they were confident that he would soon be on hand. The slow and cautious approach of the bandits gave the rangers time to cover many a mile.

At length a shrill whistle sounded from Cortina, near the Government gate; and the different parties of bandits urged their horses into the town, by the different streets.

All had been silent, the town seeming asleep; the sound of hundreds of hoofs at a slow pace making a dull rumbling noise, when, suddenly the report of a pistol broke upon the night, followed by a terrific explosion, and a sheet of fiery light, amid which high in air, flew human forms and portions of horses!

This explosion was quickly followed by another, and then another, like the discharge of heavy ordnance, while the night air was filled with piercing screams of agony, cries of horror and dread, mingled with the far-reaching shrieks of mangled horses, and the deafening clatter of the hundreds of hoofs, as the affrighted steeds stampeded wildly from the points where the explosions had occurred.

The report of the shot-guns and the crack of rifles and carbines, with the rattling discharge of revolvers, added no little to the din; and the streets of Brownsville were filled with a demoralized and terrified mob of bandits, who were so dumfounded at the appalling disaster they had met so unexpectedly, that they knew not which way to turn, or what to do—all expecting the ground beneath their horses' feet to emit fire at any moment, and rend them limb from limb.

Never, probably, did there happen a more complete and disastrous surprise to a body of invaders; the ground at the entrance to the town where the mines had been laid, being strewn with dead and dying men and horses. Some were torn, and mangled, and blackened in a horrible manner, the shrieks of the wounded creating a pandemonium; while, over all, hung a pall of black smoke, and the sulphurous odor of burnt powder filled the air.

Cortina sat his horse, by the gate of the Government grounds; and, as the first explosion rent the air, his face turned ghastly, for he saw plainly, from his position, the forms of his followers flying in the air above the house-tops, and

he knew well that his plans had in some way become known to the citizens.

Certain it was that they were prepared for him.

Then, as the deafening explosions followed, one after another, and two of them simultaneously, he was astounded, as well he might be, for destruction stared him in the face. He knew that this fearful surprise would demoralize his superstitious followers far more than would the charge of an overwhelming number of Texans.

His body-guard sat their horses, with a terrible dread stamped upon their faces; and Cortina, realizing that all depended upon himself and Juan Peres, whose voice he could hear, at times, yelling his commands, drove spurs and dashed up the street. Putting his whistle to his lips, he sounded a rally signal, his guard following close after, as if they feared their commander was riding to his death, and they wished to save him, even though they might lose their own lives in the attempt.

Turning to the right, and still sounding his whistle, surrounded by his faithful guard, Cortina dashed at headlong speed into the plaza, where Juan Peres had with difficulty collected some two hundred of the bandits, and where all was apparently quiet, as far as fighting was concerned, although a couple of hundred affrighted horses were rearing and plunging in a frenzy, and almost beyond all control of their riders.

Full fifty bandits had been killed, or were so badly wounded that they lay shrieking in the streets near the exploded mine, and many had fled to the mesquites, while some of those who were gathered in the plaza were fearfully burned and blackened. The demoralization was well nigh general, and terror had taken possession of them to such an extent that the prospect of plunder and revenge seemed not very flattering.

Loud and clear as a bell rung the voice of the bandit chief, in words of stern command, and profane and scornful rebuke; until, through the iron will of the man, he had formed his men into something like order, on the east side of the plaza. Then, suddenly, he caught sight of the swaying and whirling body of the supposed spy, hanging from the awning-frame, and he jerked his horse to haunches, and pointing significantly toward the hideous corpse, gave a vengeful yell.

The eyes of all his followers were now bent upon the victim of the rope, and the sight, as Cortina knew it would, brought them back to themselves, partly dispelled their superstitious terror, and filled them with a new longing for revenge.

As yet Bill Mann and his men had not fired a shot, nor was their presence known to the bandits. According to the young scout's instructions, the men on the outskirts of the town had, one by one, or in pairs, made their way to the rear of Pete Collins's, and up to the roofs, making quite a force. This duty having been accomplished, indeed well done, all were elated at the success of Bill's arrangements.

Having in a measure calmed his followers, Cortina led his body-guard to the south side of the plaza; he there issued an order, and half a dozen of them sprung to the ground, the remainder holding their horses.

These ran quickly and picked up the heavy tongue of an ox-wagon, with which, using it as a battering-ram, they burst in the door of a grocery store, and rolling out a cask of liquor, they smashed in the head.

A dozen tin cups were then brought out, and Cortina, signaling Juan Peres, gave him some instructions.

Juan forthwith ordered half of the bandits to hold the horses of the other half, while they helped themselves to liquor.

Cortina saw plainly that, if anything was to be accomplished, he must inflame his followers with whisky, and thus banish their fears, bracing them up, and getting them into a state of fury.

That the town was still at his mercy, he did not doubt.

In some unknown manner the citizens had become informed of his approach, and had planned to blow up his men; this being their only means of defense. It was now exhausted.

There were but few men in town—this he well knew—and these were not accustomed to warfare; consequently he would have everything his own way.

But there was one thing that surprised him. There were no shrieking women and children. This, he had fully expected.

He now decided that he would inflame his men with liquor, and then rob and burn the town; in retaliation for the hanging of the spy and others of his command, as well as for the men killed by the explosions.

The bandits sprung from their horses, and rushed *en masse* to the barrel of whisky, where the six men of the body-guard were stationed. These last dipped up and passed the tin-cups of fiery liquor; while Cortina and Peres rode into the middle of the plaza, for consultation.

Bill Mann, and those under him, had watched every movement of the bandits, but had re-

frained from firing upon them; as they well knew that such a force would burst in the doors, and swarm over the building, killing them to a man, and then fire the town.

The only hope now was that the rangers might arrive, and then there would be no doubt of victory. A man had been posted on the west side of the town, to report the coming of Colonel Ford and his men, as soon as they came within view; and another, to dash out to meet him, and explain the situation of affairs.

When the door of the grocery-store was burst in, the proprietor of the same was furious, and wanted all hands to fire at the body-guard of Cortina; but Bill refused to permit it.

"My friend," said the scout, "that barrel of whisky will do as much good as the explosion. Let them drink all they will. The more the better. We'll give them a rattling volley when Old Rip comes in sight."

The old adage, in regard to speaking of his Satanic Majesty and his imps appearing, or something to that effect, was here verified; for, at this moment, the man who had been posted to watch for the coming of the rangers, crawled upon the roof from the rear, panting with excitement and exertion, as he exclaimed, in a low voice:

"Boyees, Old Rip's comin' through ther mesquites on ther whiz, an' Jim's gone ter tell him ter skute 'roun' ther burg, an' g'in ther yellor bellyuns hot lead from abindt!"

"Dang ef I ain't all broke up!"

The citizens could hardly suppress a cheer, and the messenger got a hearty "shake" from those nearest him, as he took his position, to take, as he expressed it, "a han' in ther next deal."

"Now, boys," said Bill, "we'll give them a whack for the blood, they have spilled—Texan blood!"

"All ready, and plug right into the crowd that's drinking whisky. I'm spotting Cortina, himself. Ready! One—two—three—fire!"

A long sheet of blinding flame burst from the flat roof over the breast-high wall—a thunderous report; as between forty and fifty guns exploded as one, and the leaden hail tore through the dismounted bandits, causing a deafening chorus of shrieks, yells of horror, and screams of deathly agony.

The bandits fell like dry reeds before a "norther," dead and dying, in a mingled mass upon the plaza!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SCOUTS ON THE TRAIL.

BILL MANN took deliberate aim at the heart of Cortina, but the Fates ordained, as on many previous occasions, that his time had not come; for the very instant that Bill pulled trigger, the horse of the bandit chief, by a twitch of the bridle-rein, was caused to whirl, facing the Texans on the roof. At the same time, the animal reared frantically upward, and the bullet intended for Cortina's heart found a lodging in the brain of his horse; the animal falling as if stricken by a thunderbolt.

At once a hundred carbines belched fire and lead, the bullets flying with a whirring sound over the heads, and against the wall behind which the Texans crouched. The fire was kept up, accompanied by yells of vengeance that drowned the groans and shrieks of the wounded.

The survivors among the bandits sprung into their saddles, Cortina mounting the first riderless horse he came to; those of his red shirt guard, who were left alive, surrounding him.

Then, as it happened, the bandit chief, ever on the lookout, when he sprung upon the steed, caught sight of the rangers dashing toward the plaza, by the eastern streets. Quickly his whistle sounded shrill through the din, sounded a retreat signal, and he spurred at headlong speed out of the plaza, and to the west, followed by his demoralized horde; the bullets from the revolvers of Bill Mann and the citizens dropping bandits all along the square, and the side street.

On they went, with yells of fright toward the mesquites and the Government road, over which they had so lately traveled, without a thought of anything but booty and revenge; dreaming not that they would leave one third of their number dead and dying in the streets of Brownsville, and be forced to flee for their lives up the Rio Grande again.

But, when once clear of the town, Cortina, maddened to fury by his reverses, succeeded, with the aid of Juan Peres, in bringing his demoralized followers to a halt, and an approach to something like order, massed in a line, two deep. This was done, because he well knew that the rangers would presently dash from the town in pursuit; and then great loss of life would ensue, should his forces be set upon from the rear, while in confused retreat.

His conclusions were correct, for hardly had he, with the assistance of his lieutenant, by commands and threats, and by inciting a new thirst for revenge, gotten his motley mob of marauders into line on the border of the mesquites; when out from the street that led direct-

ly to the plaza, dashed the rangers, with a wild cry of exultation and fury.

Out they dashed from the dwellings, over the dead and dying victims of one of the mines, four abreast, with wild cheers sounding as they saw that Cortina had made a stand.

Colonel Ford, Captain Donaldson, Bill Mann on his new mount, Old Rocky, Captain Gaines, and the young Englishman—these in the front, all covered with the dust of the road, which had adhered to their perspiring faces during their rapid gallop.

"Cuss my cats!" yelled Old Rocky; "ther condemned yaller-hide pepper-chawers air goin' ter make a stan', sure es shootin'!"

"Hyer's fun until yer can't rest, boyees. Stan'-ther-Press, an' Cap, an' Bill, keep one o' yer peepers on ther dang'd skunk Juan Peres, an' 'low him ter skute, ef we-uns bu'sts up ther lay-out; fer, ef he's laid out stiff, thar's poor chances o' our findin' ther leetle gal. Thet's ther size o' my opine. Dang my dogs! Yunder comes ther back-stickers from Resaca-way!"

And, sure enough, on through the mesquites at full speed, winding among the clumps, came several parties of bandits; some from the Resaca, and some that had, when the explosion occurred, fled to the thickets, in fear and dread.

On they came, to swell Cortina's forces, nearly to the number he had when entering the town; full three hundred strong. But, undaunted, cool, and firm, the fifty rangers, at the ringing command of "Old Rip," fell into a long single line, ready to charge down upon six times their own number. However, every man was a host in himself, and held the lives of many at his finger-tips; their confidence in their invincibility, and consciousness of the justice of their cause, being one-half the battle.

No time was lost. No body-guard was required for Colonel Ford, who took his chances on an equality with his brave boys, leading the right of the line.

Every man's senses and muscles were strained for instantaneous action, and movements to favor a victorious ending to the fight.

"Every man for himself in this game!" yelled Old Rip. "Remember the Alamo, and do your duty for Texas, boys! Come on, and don't waste a shot. Charge!"

It was a grand and magnificent sight, to see that little band of Texan heroes dash headlong toward that yellow-skinned horde of chaparral pirates, whose villainous eyes flashed vengefully, as they gripped their *escopetas*, bending forward in their saddles, confident of annihilating the squad of hated Texans, that dashed toward them at terrific speed—the ranger yell sounding clear and shrill.

Once again the whistle of the bandit chief pierced the ears of his followers, and every one of them drove spurs home. Three hundred half-wild steeds bounded forward, with frantic snorts of pain and fright to meet the shock of the Texan charge.

Not half the distance between the Mexicans and Texans was passed when a peculiar yell was given by Colonel Ford, and fifty carbines sprung to shoulder as one, belching fire and lead with a thunderous report. This was quickly followed by another and another, until five sheets of flame and five showers of "blue whistlers" had hurtled through the Greaser ranks. Then the carbines were hastily hung at saddle-horn, and, with a six-shooter in each hand, the rangers closed in among the demoralized bandits.

No troops in the world could have stood under that terrible fire from the Colt's five-chambered rifles, that carried conical Minie balls, which tore great holes through the flesh and shattered the bones, certain death being the portion of any one who was hit with them in either head or body. And every ranger shot to kill, and pulled trigger so fast, until the five chambers were empty, that an avalanche of death overwhelmed the bandits before they themselves had fired a shot.

The slaughter was terrible. Wounded and dying men and mustangs struggled amid a horrible mass of blood-reeking dead, the gore running in streams on the ground, and standing in pools, while the moon shone down upon the ghastly sight, causing it to appear ten-fold more awful.

Shrieks and yells of anger, terror and horror filled the air, cutting through the sulphurous smoke of battle.

The right and left wing of the bandits blazed into the rangers and endeavored to surround them as the gallant Texans cut through the center with their deadly carbines, but right on, over dead and dying men and horses, flew the rangers, the hoofs of their steeds crushing the bodies of both man and beast in their headlong charge.

They then turned with their terrible army revolvers, firing fusillade after fusillade in among the bandits, the right and left wing having met and endeavored to dash upon the Texans in an overwhelming charge.

Frantic, riderless horses bounded in every direction, and the battle-field was a pandemonium, both vocal and optical.

Always in the front, Captain Gaines and Percy, the Englishman, keeping Goldie in mind,

fought with mad fury alongside Old Rocky and Bill Mann; but such a battle could not long continue. It was simply a massacre.

In ten minutes after the first discharge of carbines not a bandit was to be seen, except such as lay in heaps, dead or dying, on the blood-reeking field, all having fled with bated breath and horror-filled eyes into the mesquites, Cortina seeing the utter hopelessness of the situation, having sounded a retreat signal.

And so jaded and broken were the horses of the rangers that they could not follow, but their victory was most flattering to them, and they were forced to be satisfied.

"Dang my dogs, an' cuss my cats!" yelled Old Rocky, "that condemned Juan Peres hev skuted, sloped, levanted, slid out, an' he'll go straight fer ther leetle gal er I'm a liar!"

"Come, Cap Gaines, an' Stan'-ther-Press, we'll hump ourselves fer Pete's an' git fresh nags an' then go jist a-bilin' arter ther cuss. Ther yaller scum 'll scatter in every direc', so we'll not hev many ter buck ag'in' ef we does run ag'in' some on 'em."

"Great Crockett! Didn't we-uns salerwate 'em? They're a-layin' 'roun' es thick es sardines. I hain't gut much breathe lef', but I'm arter ther leetle gal, like a blue-whistler favored by a double-barrel'd norther. Bill, lay 'roun' hyer-a-ways until we gits fresh nags."

Those of our characters whom we have followed from Resaca de la Palma through their various and exciting adventures were collected together as Old Rocky thus spoke, Captain Gaines and the young Englishman being greatly discouraged, in fact, about ready to give up in despair, at the disappearance of Juan Peres upon securing of whom they had come to think depended the recovery of Goldie.

The reasonings of the scouts had in all cases, since meeting them, proved correct; and they both fully believed, that by following Peres, the maiden might be discovered and rescued.

This had been uppermost in their minds throughout the fight, and the night gallop; and consequently they were greatly depressed when they found that the bandit-lieutenant, as well as Cortina himself, had disappeared, and no one could tell in what direction.

Bill Mann urged them to get a fresh mount as quick as possible, and dash up the river road with him.

They could scout after Juan Peres, and if they should be unsuccessful in finding him, they could at least watch the Reonosa ford.

No time was lost; and, in fifteen minutes, Old Rocky, Bill Mann, Captain Gaines, and Percy were galloping up the Government road again, each with a flask of whisky, to brace them up, in their search for poor Goldie.

They were all greatly fatigued, from having been so long in their saddles. The two scouts, however, although they had had no rest at all, seemed not to mind the privation; so rejoiced were they at the great victory over the bandits.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RECAPTURED.

LITTLE LIGHTNING, when he left the opening with Goldie, hung the two carbines, that he had taken from the bandits that he had slain, at his saddle-horn, and appropriated the belt of one of the Greasers. In a scabbard, attached to this, he found to his delight a revolver, and retaining one of the knives, he felt that he was then "fixed" to defend himself and his sister.

His success, in "taking out of the dew," the two Mexicans, caused him great satisfaction; and he felt himself well able to cope with half a dozen Greasers, if he could only get the "drop" on them.

He determined to keep his eyes open, and not to be surprised, and again captured; for, he felt confident that, if he again fell into the power of the bandits, he would be murdered in cold blood.

Should he be taken by any stragglers, who were aware of his first capture, they would most undoubtedly decide that he had, in some manner, killed those who had been set to guard him, and they would then shoot him on the spot; and should he be taken by others of Cortina's forces, who knew nothing of his former capture, and of his life having been preserved by Juan Peres for some unknown object, they too would not think of sparing him.

He well knew that, had it not been for Peres, the bandits would have murdered him at the first; and, as has been before mentioned, it was a mystery to the youth why he had been saved from death by such a merciless fiend as he knew Juan Peres to be, unless it was that he might glut his revenge on Captain Gaines in some horrible manner.

This was the most reasonable solution to the mystery; for Gerald was aware that his father had, more than once, been in command of parties, who went out to hunt and hang Juan Peres, if they could find him. This, the bandit must know; and therefore he intended to avenge himself on the father through the son.

At all events, the boy had, through a course of deep thought on the subject before escaping from his bonds, decided that if he succeeded

and was recaptured, death would follow immediately, and, in that case, poor Goldie would be lost forever. Consequently he determined to guard against surprise, and to fight like a fiend should any bandits come upon them before they could secrete themselves.

As much as he had suffered, both mentally and physically, he assumed a cheery and unconcerned manner, in order to encourage his sister, who, poor child, was in a most deplorable state of mind, and suffering greatly from fatigue and from the effects of the cords that had cut into her tender flesh.

Although free, and, as she believed, on her way to the camp on Resaca de la Palma, poor Goldie had but little hope of ever again seeing her father, or of reaching their camp; for she apprehended that bandits would spring upon them from every dark thicket, and was tortured by constant dread, having but little confidence in her youthful brother's being able to defend her and himself in the event of their meeting any Greasers.

As has been stated in a previous chapter, Little Lightning, as soon as they were out from the thick chaparral that encompassed the opening, and among the scattering mesquites, rode by the side of Goldie, and strove to encourage her by words and manner.

"I tell you, Sis," he said, "I'm not so slow as you think, and I should judge that, by this time, you would set me down as no slouch, at least."

"Didn't I get away with those two Greasers in a scientific manner? Well, I should say I did! And probably there ain't another young fellar in the State that would have had the 'sand' to carry out his plans as did yours truly."

"In the first place, I made all necessary arrangements, and took all precautions against a miss, which I knew I was liable to make, by tying their ankles together. If I hadn't struck home, and to the spot, I had the deadwood on them anyway; for they couldn't stand up, and they had no knives to cut themselves loose."

"I should then have made a jump for the carbines, and blowed their brains out, running the risk of the report's being heard."

"Gerald, please don't talk any more about that terrible scene in the opening," pleaded his sister. "I shall never, never forget it until my dying day. It was most horrible!"

"I expected to see you struck to the earth and killed; and when the bandits staggered to their feet, their awful appearance took my breath away. I was sure that they would rush upon you and murder you, and then me."

"I did not know that they were tied effectually, or that you had stabbed them in a vital part. But thank God! that is past, and we are free."

"You are very brave, Gerald, and I am proud of you; but we are far from being safe, I very much fear. How do you know that we are going in the right direction?"

"I know it, Sis, by the stars. We are traveling toward the southeast, and such a course will take us to, or near, Brownsville. I will admit that we are not going toward Resaca, and that I do not think it safe to do so, for the chaparrals in that direction are full of bandits."

"If we can get to the town we are all right, and I think it very possible that father may have gone there."

"Poor papa!" sighed Goldie. "You say, Gerald, that he galloped from the camp in a wild, half-sane state in search of me? Perhaps the Mexicans have killed him. Oh, why, why did we leave our happy home and come to this awful place?"

"Don't fret, Sis; it's wicked. You ought to thank the good Lord that we escaped as we did. As for father, he don't kill easy. He's tough, if he is old, and a crack shot besides. Then, there's the Englishman who came to our camp with Bill Mann and Old Rocky—he's with father. He was wounded in the head, by the Greasers, and I believe it injured his brain. Anyway, he appeared a little 'off his cabase,' and he went on the 'whiz' after father, and but a short distance behind him; although, for my life, I can't tell why he did."

"If he and father had remained in camp, Old Rocky and Bill Mann would have helped them trace you up. I take it that the Englishman, if the blood was washed off his face, would be a fine-looking fellow. He's a first cut sort of a chap, I know; and judging from his clothes, he's got rocks."

"Sis, cheer up, I say, or you'll give me the blues. We'll strike Brownsville in a couple of hours, I reckon. I'm going to turn south now, and I have no doubt we'll soon get into the road that runs up-river to the forts and towns."

"I should feel encouraged," said Goldie, "if we could get to a road. This endless chaparral is so gloomy, and suggestive of ambush."

"Keep up your spirits," said the youth, "and we'll soon be O. K. I know, Goldie, that you have suffered terribly, and that you do now. You ought to be thankful, however, that things are as well with us as they are."

"Indeed I am, Gerald; but I am so ill and lame, and my brain is wild, thinking of the dread experiences of this awful night, and of poor father galloping through the chaparrals in search of me, or it may be lying cold and dead."

where no one will ever find him—killed by those dreadful bandits!"

"Hurra, Sis! Here's the road at last!" cried out Gerald. "I thought we'd strike it. Now we're all right. Can you stand a gallop?"

"Oh, yes! I am quite sure I can. Thank Heaven, we have found the road! I begin to have hope of escape now."

The girl and boy, who had passed through such dread experiences during the night, entered, as they spoke, the Government road, and at once pointed down the same, toward Brownsville, at a gallop; both filled with relief and thankfulness—feelings that would have vanished, had they known what was transpiring in the town in which they hoped for safety. Indeed, had they known what was before them they would have plunged again into the labyrinthian chaparrals; even did they know that they would be forced to wander in the same for days.

But there was none to warn them of the fearful consequences of riding toward Brownsville; and, on they sped, filled with joyous anticipations of reaching a point of civilization and safety.

Mile after mile was passed, and their horses were covered with flecks of foam; when, suddenly, as they were loping along between walls of impenetrable chaparral, a party of horsemen dashed at headlong speed around a bend of the road, directly toward them.

Both jerked their horses to a halt, Little Lightning crying out:

"Sis, who are they, white or yellow?"

"Save us! Protect us!" exclaimed the poor girl, in a despairing voice. "Gerald, my brother, we are lost! It is Juan Peres!"

But the words of Goldie were unheard, for Little Lightning had seen their peril, and at once grasped one of the carbines from his saddle-horn and raising the weapon to his shoulder, fired.

One of the bandits threw up his hands, gave a horrible yell, and fell over the hams of his startled horse to the ground; while another sounding report caused a second Greaser to fall headlong into the dust of the road, dead.

Throwing the now useless carbines to the earth, the brave youth drew his revolver, and spurring his horse in front of Goldie, between her and the advancing outlaws, he braced himself for a defense of his sister; but the next moment he was himself stricken to the earth by a bullet striking his head. He fell forward from his frenzied steed, which sprung wildly away, leaving Little Lightning outstretched between the two bandits that he had shot, his face covered with blood, and to all appearance, dead.

As Gerald fell from his horse, Goldie gave a shriek of despair and anguish, her senses leaving her, and as she was falling from her saddle, she was caught by Juan Peres, and clasped to his breast. Away the lieutenant of Cortina spurred furiously up the road, gazing back at times in terror, as if expecting to catch sight of the avengers—those who were in search of Goldie, but whom he swore by all the saints should never again look upon her face.

Four bandits followed him in a mad gallop, leaving Little Lightning where he had fallen, between his yellow-skinned and desperate foes, who were now dead and blood-stained, and presented a most horrid spectacle in the moonlit road, as their glassy, soulless eyes were fixed upon the star-studded sky, their features contorted with hatred and agony, and their clothing covered with dust from their rolling in the road in their dying struggles.

And the brave boy Gerald Gaines lay between them, his youthful, handsome face covered with the blood that welled from the wound in his head where the bullet had plunged along his skull, his wavy, brown hair filled with gore and dust, and his skin, where not blood stained, white as the driven snow—his brave spirit seemingly fled from its tenement of clay.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WORTH A DOZEN DEAD PEOPLE.

"Cuss my cats! Double me up, an' wring an' twist all ther bleed outen my 'natemy, ef doubled-bar'l'd biz hain't bin on ther programme ever since sundown!" exclaimed Old Rocky, as he, with his three pards, galloped up the Government road.

The four men rode abreast, and swept the chaparral on all sides, as well as the road ahead, with anxious eyes; the old scout chewing his "nigger-head" most spitefully, and squirting the tobacco-juice over his horse's head with vim.

As the whole party seemed too much depressed and hopeless to advance an opinion on the night's work at the moment, Old Rocky continued:

"Pard Bill, I'm opinin' thet ther cuss-cat, Cortina, ther boss butcher o' ther Bravo, hev skuted 'roun', an' slid across ther ferry inter Met'moras, ter bustle up more back-stickers, an' glide up-river on ther Mex' side, afore they finds out how dog gone bad his outfit gut wo'sted ter-night by we-uns an' ther citz.

"Bill, I sots yer down es ther peartest, smart-

est, cutesst cuss, fur es brains air 'sidered, thet ever bucked ag'in' red er yaller hellyuns. No-buddy 'u'd think o' plantin' powder thet-a-way, an' blowin' ther condemned pepper-chawers inter kingdom come by ther hullsale, 'ceptin' yeou. I'll sw'ar hit war a neat job, an' yer orter get a gold medal, all flickerin' w'l' di'monds, ter hang 'roun' yer neck!

"Hit orter be persented by ther citz o' Brown, an' hev a keg o' powder 'graved outen hit, jist a-simmerin' on ther bu'st-up whiz.

"Dang'd ef ther yaller scum didn't git saler-wated all 'roun'; an' ther citz 'll hev a nasty ole time diggin' holes, an' kiverin' 'em, 'thout they're cute enough ter sling 'em inter ther Grandee.

"Howsomever, what we-uns all orter sot our thinkin' mersheens ter work at, air 'bout ther leetle gal. Hit's plain ter see, es ther bloody rag on Stan'-ther-Press's bead, thet ther or'nary pirut, Juan Peres, bossed ther Greaser outfit on Resaca, an' kerra'd Goldie."

"Hold, gentlemen!" exclaimed Percy, in a loud voice, which showed that he was greatly excited, and suddenly throwing off the deep despondency that had caused him to seem utterly heedless of his surroundings. "I have, ever since we started from the battle ground, been trying to decide when I had seen this Juan Peres, whom you pointed out as the man we must follow, in order to save my little cousin, whom I never saw; but whom I have sought for years.

"I met that man a few days since—I think three days ago—in Matamoras, at the hotel where I was stopping. I am positive of this.

"And by heavens! Now that I recall our conversation, I am also, not only positive that I revealed to him the secret of my voyage to this country, but I also exhibited to him, a picture of the mother of the missing girl.

"Captain Gaines, my dear friend, here it is! You will at once recognize the resemblance between mother and child, if any exists."

The young Englishman produced the portrait on ivory from his inner breast-pocket, and passed it to Captain Gaines; who, no sooner turned the miniature at such an angle as to allow the moon to shine upon it, than he exclaimed, with great emotion:

"It is! It is my Goldie herself—the exact counterpart of my darling! Mr. Percy, I am confident, I have not the slightest doubt that my adopted child is the one you seek. But you will not—you must not—should we find her, deprive me of her. It would kill me!"

"Heaven forbid that I should seek to do anything contrary to the wishes of either of you!" said the young man, with deep feeling. "You have suffered enough, and more, this night, on her account, than any man ever ought to endure in a lifetime. You are a Christian gentleman, and you have reared and loved her as your own. I firmly believe that a curse would fall upon any one who would deprive you of her.

"I am thankful that I have found my cousin, although it has been under such terrible circumstances. But we'll rescue her, if we have to turn the world over. Pass the picture over to our friends!"

Captain Gaines gazed fixedly at the portrait, as he had done from the moment it had been shown to him; and it was with seeming reluctance that he passed it to Old Rocky, the scout making no objection to the short halt, as the horses needed, in the language of Old Rocky, a breathin' spell."

"Dang ther blue-kivered univarsel!" exclaimed the old scout, as he glanced at the beautiful features upon the ivory. "Yer doesn't mean ter asserwate that thar air or ever war a human thet skipped on this big ball o' dirt like thet?"

"She must ha' bin an angel, an' they orter painted wings outen her, dead sure an' sart'in! Ef ther leetle gal looks like thet, hit's enough ter make a pilgrim chaw his years off ter think she's took by ther greasy, yaller back-sticker, Juan Peres; and I sw'ar ter thunder, by ther Alamo, an' by ther bleed o' ther slam-up humans that fit and died thar, thet she's got ter be reskied, ef Ole Rock hes ter hump hisself jist a bi'llin on ther war-path, clean ter ther city o' Mex'!"

"Pard Bill, jist gaze et thet plecter! Hit'll g'in ver an idee 'bout ther gin'ral run o' ther poperlation o' Paradise. Dang my ole gizzard, ef hit doesn't gi'n me a appertite ter say, 'Now I lay me, flop over an' make a die of hit, jist ter see ef I won't fetch up somewhere in the chap'rell outside, where I kin skin my peepers, and gaze over ther wall whar sich angels air a-floppin' wings through ther shiny air, 'mong a rain o' gold dust an' di'monds!"

"Hit's enough ter make sich a ole raw-hide ripper es me crawl inter a kiote-hole an' drag ther bole in arter me, ter gaze et sich a pretty pictur', an' know thar air sich humans on this hyar yearth. But, dang hit! Puserlanimous ole terbac'-hasher es I air, I kin fight like forty panther-cats ter resky ther leetle gal!"

The old scout here spat spitefully, and instinctively clapped his hand on the butt of his revolver. He then glanced at Bill Mann, who was still looking at the portrait with deep interest and admiration.

"That air jist like Goldie, I swan!" asserted

the young scout. "Boyees, hit puts more vim into me ter gaze et hit—an' we-uns, ef I ain't mistook, hev gut a heap o' tough scoutin' ter git her back.

"An' yer says, Stan'-ther Press, thet yer see'd Juan Peres in Maternoras, and tole all 'bout bein' arter a los' gal what war like this pictur', mos' likely; an' thet she war wo'th a heap o' money 'cross ther big drink—yer tole him thet, did yer?"

"Yes, Bill, I tole him everything, I had been taking some wine with him, and I believe he stole some letters from me."

"Then yer kin jist bet," said Bill, "thet he hev got a notion ter hev a bolt o' thet big pile, 'cross ther pond, some way."

"By Heavens!" exclaimed Captain Gaines, greatly excited. "He intends to force her into a marriage with him, and then go to England and claim the Percy estates!"

"I believe you have hit the nail on the head, my friend," assented Percy; "but we will stop all that. My vessel will be the first to sail from the mouth of the river. I think we have hit upon his object, and, knowing it, we can work to greater advantage.

"However, he must not be permitted to torture the poor girl into a marriage, or to torment her further. We must act at once. I shall be on the rack until she is discovered."

Bill Mann returned the picture to Percy, and all now dashed onward, having made but a few minutes' halt.

"Bill," said the captain, after they had galloped a short distance, "I hope you left my son Gerald safe in camp on the Resaca. Poor boy! He will be distracted with grief and anxiety, for he worshiped Goldie."

Bill Mann fixed his eyes on Old Rocky instead of replying, as though he wished that his old pard would relieve him by answering the question; but the latter looked straight ahead up the road, chewing his "nigger-head" vigorously and spitting spitefully, as if his thoughts were anything but agreeable.

For some time Bill hesitated, but the anxious looks of the captain at length forced him to speak.

"Cap Gaines," said the young scout, "Little Lightnin' jumped a mule an' lit out et stompede speed, through ther chap'rels up the Resaca, arter yer, an' jist ahind Stan'-ther-Press, when yer lef' camp. We-uns hain't see'd him since. He 'peared ter be 'bout crazy when he see'd yer streakin' up-crick lookin' so wile, an' he tried his bestest ter stop yer, yellin' like a Cur-manch'."

"Oh, my God! My poor boy—my poor boy! What have I done to merit such suffering? I tell you, Bill Mann, Gerald has been slain by the bandits. I feel it—I know it!"

"Ef yer doesn't quit sich gab," exclaimed the old scout, "ef yer doesn't brace up an' skip over ther clouds inter sunshine, I'll slump right inter my butes an' take a ole he see-ester. I ain't made o' iron. I'm a ole rawhide, I knows, but dang hit, ther hide'll git slimsy an' wore out, ef hit's used too rough!"

"We-uns hev gut ter keep our ideas on Goldie an' Juan Peres. Es fer Little Lightning, ef he don't scrouge through an' come out all bunk, I'll chaw bugs fer grub ther nex' six moons.

"Cheer up, Cap Gaines, an' jab spurs! Thar's biz ahead, an' no time ter borry trouble. Ther boyees air O. K. an' I'll gamble on hit. Dang my dorgs, ef thar ain't some humans laid out stiff on ther road! Pard Bill, does yer under-comstan' thet outfit?"

"I'm kinder sot back 'bout hit, Ole Rock," replied Bill, looking earnestly ahead. "Thar hain't bin none o' our boyees hyer-a-ways, an' hit's strange. Thar's bin shutin' did, thet's sartain; an' hit ain't likely ther cussed yaller scum hev bin fightin' 'mong tharselves. Dog-goned ef thar hain't three stiff's laid out, chuck up ag'in' each other!"

Riding on at increased speed our friends soon reached the slain, their horses snorting and plunging at the scent of human blood and the sight of the corpses.

No sooner, however, did the quartette ride up near the dead than Captain Gaines sprung from his horse with a loud cry.

"My son—my son! Oh, Gerald—my brave little Gerald!"

Frantic, indeed, were the actions of the old man, who now fell upon his knees in the blood and dust of the road, while he clasped the body of his son in his arms.

"Cuss my cats! Condemn ther cussed scum o' ther Grandee!" cried out Old Rocky. "Bill, this air ther wo'stest o' ther night's work, ef thet leetle boy air gone ter kingdom come.

"Jump down, wi' yer canteen, an' 'vestergate. I'll swaller a cat fish, horns an' all, tail fust, ef Leetle Lightnin' didn't take two hellyuns outen ther wet, an' spile 'em fer futur' back-stickin', afore he wilted with lead on his brain!"

Bill Mann was furious, and sprung at once, with canteen and whisky-flask to the ground. He then poured water plentifully over the youth's head, washing off the blood and dust.

Captain Gaines was now a sad sight to look upon; and Bill pushed him to one side, took the head of the boy upon his arm and forcing the

nozzle of the flask into his mouth, poured some whisky down his throat.

Gerald gave out a gasping, gurgling sound for a moment, his form trembled and quivered; then he opened his eyes, and stared around him.

"Thank ther good Lord! Ther boyee air hunk," called out the young scout.

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dorgs, ef thet doesn't fill me chuck full o' ole he glad!" burst out Old Rocky. "Brace up, Leetle Lightning! Yere woth a dozen dead men."

Captain Gaines was silent from excitement and gratitude too deep for words.

"Gentlemen," said Percy, "this is most remarkable. This youth, to all appearances, killed those two bandits, before he was shot down himself. Would he have risked his life thus, think you, if he had not been defending some one else? Would he not, had he been alone, have hidden in the chaparral at the approach of these murderous bandits?"

"Dang'd ef thar ain't a p'int ter consider!" put in Old Rocky, tearing off a fresh chew of "nigger-head" as he spoke.

"But wait, Leetle Lightning! 'll spit common-sense 'Nited States, in a few fleetin' periods."

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE DISTANCE.

"FATHER, where have you been? Where is Goldie? Did you take her away from Juan Peres?"

These were the first words of Little Lightning when he recognized those who were about him.

The scouts and Percy exchanged significant glances.

"For mercy's sake," returned the captain, "tell us, Gerald, if you have seen Goldie; and explain, if you can, your present terrible condition. We thought you dead."

"Reckon I did have a close call," said the boy faintly; "but I'll live, I hope, to kill Juan Peres."

A deathly pallor now overspread Gerald's face, and Bill administered another dose of liquor, while Captain Gaines produced a handkerchief which, when they had saturated it with whisky, they bound it about the youth's head, after first drawing the torn scalp together and applying some of the bruised pulp of the prickly pear.

Little Lightning soon revived, and called out to the old scout, who stood looking down at him with pitying solicitude.

"Old Rocky, please rattle around the chaparral here, and you'll run against the horses of these bandits, and the one I rode here too. I reckon I'll be all right in a few minutes. I asked you, father, if you had seen Goldie—if you had rescued her from Juan Peres?"

No, my son; would to God we had! We are waiting for you to recover sufficiently to explain. From your words we judge—in fact, we know—that you must have seen our darling, and in the power of that inhuman monster."

Old Rocky at once departed, upon being requested by Gerald, to search for the horses.

Bill Mann supported the wounded youth, and frequently poured water upon his head, while Percy held to the bridles of the animals of the party.

"Yes, father; I have not only seen Goldie, but I have been a captive with her since a few minutes after you and Mr. Percy dashed out of our camp on the Resaca. You both rode right past the thicket where Juan Peres and six of his men crouched, our Goldie lying senseless among them."

Captain Gaines and Percy looked at each other, both being greatly astonished. Before the youth again spoke, Old Rocky rode up with the best horse of the three—the animal which Gerald had ridden from the "open" after slaying the bandit guards.

The old scout dismounted, holding the slack of the neck ropes, and advanced to the group, saying:

"Cuss my cats! I run ag'in' ther bull three critters, an' as we-uns hev no use fer t'others, I tuck ther bestest, 'cache-in' ther bridles an' saddles o' t'others in ther chap'rell."

"Thanks, Old Rocky," said Little Lightning. "I'll be ready to mount and ride as soon as I tell you all my story."

The youth then related the happenings of the night—his escape with Goldie and her recapture. The worst fears of all were confirmed. The poor girl was in the power of the miscreant, Juan Peres!

"How long since was it, Gerald?" asked his father; "and which way did he go?"

The captain, in his excitement, lost sight of the fact that his son had been senseless and knew nothing of the occurrences after he had been shot, or of the time that had since elapsed.

"Don't bother ther boy, cap'n," said Bill, quickly. "He doesn't know nothin' 'bout things, 'aint 'tall likely. But Ole Rock an' I'll soon fix him all right. Kin yer stan' up, leetle pard?"

Little Lightning arose, with the assistance of the young scout, and began to pace back and forth in the road, to get his blood in circulation.

Old Rocky and Bill Mann now closely examined the corpses and their surroundings, soon rejoining their friends, when the old scout said:

"Ther condemned cuss bev lin gone a hour, an' hev skuted up ther road wi' two more o' his yellor back-stickers. Thar's an ormighty slim show ter catch him afore he crosses ther Grandee et Reonosa, which 'll be jist 'bout daylight."

"Come, we kin hump ourselves up-crick an' do ther bes' we kin. Leetle Lightning, kin yer shake up vim 'nough ter ride?"

"Yes, Old Rocky; I'd ride on if I had to be tied in the saddle. I'll follow Juan Peres to the end of the earth, if necessary, to save Goldie; and I'll have his heart's blood then!"

The youth was assisted into his saddle and all sped on up the road toward Reonosa.

Gerald grew stronger as time passed, and all the party refreshed themselves as they rode by eating strips of jerked beef and corn pone, which Old Rocky had in his saddle bags—the old scout saying, as he produced this substantial lunch:

"Cuss my cats, ef yer ever find this ole raw-hide ripper without somethin' in ther line o' grub in his bags. I hes skuted over ther prerars too long fer thet, though hit tuck me some time ter l'arn; bein' 'bout starved ter death more'n onc'e afore I gut inter ther notion o' packin' somethin' ter chaw."

"Bill, shove another drink o' whisky et Leetle Lightning an' Stan-ther Press, fer they hes lost a heap o' bleed. When thar stumjacks air full o' beef an' corn-pone hit won't be likely ter make thar heads buzz."

Bill Mann rode ahead, scanning alternately the "sign" on the road and the chaparral on either side, being ready with his "six" to take a snap shot at a moment's warning.

Percy rode by the side of Captain Gaines, suffering greatly, as the long, rapid and continuous galloping had worn him greatly, aside from the loss of blood; but still he strove to throw off or repudiate pain, and endeavored to cheer the captain up, although he had little hope of rescuing Goldie from Juan Peres. Their only chance was, in his opinion, by crossing into Mexico.

Suddenly Bill Mann halted, and the next moment all were by his side.

"What's up, pard Bill?" cried out Old Rocky.

"Ther dang'd chap'rell pirut hes lef' ther road an' tuck ter ther bush!"

"Thet doesn't 'mount ter shucks," asserted the old scout. "He'll p'int fer ther Reonosa ford, er skute 'roun' hit an' glide further up-river. We-uns kin 'zamine ther mud an' kin tell whether they've struck 'cross ther drink. So jist keep on ther flicker."

"Thet's 'bout ther p'ogramme, old pard!" agreed Bill. So on went the party; but the gray streaks of morning shot up eastward before they reached the ford, and then the approach to the same showed that quite a number of horsemen had crossed into Mexico within at least an hour.

The river was low and a horse could wade most of the distance across and swim the main channel. Had it been high it would have been impossible to reach the Mexican side, except on the old ferry-boat, which was kept from being washed down-stream by a large cable, stretched from bank to bank, two ropes from the boat being attached to the heel of an iron of peculiar form, within which was a wheel that fitted and glided along the cable.

The scouts knew that it would be madness to think of crossing into Mexico by daylight, especially so at Reonosa, as nearly all the people of the town were in sympathy with Cortina and did all in their power to aid him.

Few in number as they were, they would be shot like dogs before they could proceed a mile into Mexico.

This was explained to Percy, the captain and Gerald, and they were filled with torturing perplexity as to what should be done; feeling that they would all become insane with anxiety and apprehension if they remained inactive.

"Mebbe so ther condemned cuss hev levanted up-river," said Old Rocky, more to entice the others from the ford than aught else; for he firmly believed that Juan Peres had crossed to Reonosa.

"We-uns better skute up a bit, an' 'vester-gate; hedn't we, pard Bill?"

The old scout gave his young pard a sly wink as he spoke.

"Thet's ther only thing we kin do, Ole Rock. I'm inclernated ter opine we'll strike somethin' by keepin' 'long ther Grandee bank, an' hev in' a eye on this an' t'other side too. Come on! Hit won't do fer any o' ther sneakin' cusses ter friz ther peepers onter us from t'other side, arter ther big scrimmage et Brown."

"They're red-hot 'bout now; er they will be, es soon es ther or'nary devils what war in ther row slings tongue 'roun' Reonosa. A white man's life won't be woth a shuck cigarette, 'cross crick, arter it gits ginerly known thet we-uns salervated sich a heap o' ther chap'rell piruts, an' split Cortina's fit-out all ter flinders. "He's in Met'moras now, I'm gamblin' heavy on thet; an' he'll hev es big a crowd es ever 'fore ter-morrer night. But le's levant, boyees. We couldn't strike hyar afore this: an' thar's

sich a bright moon crossin', hit 'u'd be ormighty dangerous anyway."

"Levant's ther word, boyees," said Old Rocky, "an' peepers wide open et thet. We'll git ther leetle gal yit, er bu'st ther hull o' Mex' up."

As there was no other manner of proceeding open, the captain, Percy and Gerald followed the scouts, more hopeless and despairing than they had been at any previous time. They had, however, the utmost confidence in Bill Mann and Old Rocky; feeling that if any men in the world could get trace of Goldie, they were the men.

And on through the scattering mesquites, up the Rio Grande, the party proceeded; keeping near the brink of the awful chasm, in the bed of which, two hundred feet below, flowed the waters of the Rio Grande.

At places the opposite bank of Mexico, which was on a level with the Texan side, was clear of mesquites and cacti; and they could see quite a distance from the river. When the sun arose, a fiery sphere in the brazen sky, they reached a point directly across from where Cortina had secured Sharp Eye, the Seminole, to the mesquite.

Here a far-stretching view of the open plain on the Mexican side was obtained, which was immediately inspected by the scouts. Old Rocky jerked his horse to his haunches on the instant, exclaiming in a voice of great excitement:

"Cuss all ther condemned cats my gran'marm an' great-gran'marm ever see'd, white, black, yellor an' speckled! Somebuddy hold me tight er I'll chaw my years off!"

"Pards, jist gaze out over yunder. I hopes ter be nibbled ter death by dipper ducks ef thar ain't ther leetle gal an' ther condemned back-stickin' pepper-chawer, Juan Peres, an' they've gut 'cross inter Mex', dead sure an' sartain! I'd like ter double him, an' twist him, an' wring out his bleed, an' then bake his bones on mesquite coals. I wish't I c'u'd jump my critter 'cross ther Grandee!"

The old scout rattled these words off in a rapid manner, nearly insane with fury. Bill sat his horse in silence, his eyes fixed upon the Mexique plain in terrible rage and apprehension. The captain, his son, and Percy were dumfounded.

Sure enough, not more than a quarter of a mile from the opposite bank, were three horsemen; and, upon a fourth horse, was a female, her long hair flying wildly about her shoulders.

Captain Gaines groaned from his inmost soul.

"Goldie! Goldie! My darling!" he cried, in his bitter anguish. "Heaven preserve and protect you!"

Little Lightning, with one wild cry, fell from his horse to the ground—senseless and pallid as a corpse.

"Oh, my God! Is this the end of my long, long search?" cried Percy, as he sprang from his saddle, seated himself on the ground, and supported Gerald's head on his knee; while all gazed at the maiden, whose identity they could not doubt, being carried away to some bandit haunt by a fiend in human shape, a dastard, unworthy of the name of man!

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE DEPTHS OF THE RIO GRANDE.

WORDS are inadequate to express or describe the feelings of those who had hoped against hope, and now stood speechless and faint, the dangers and privations and mental sufferings having served greatly to weaken them, while the wounds of Percy and Gerald caused them to feel the strain more than can be easily imagined.

All had watched the long golden hair of the captive girl, flying in the morning sunlight, a halo about the head of her for whom they would have risked life a hundred times to save her from the dread and terrible fate that seemed destined to be hers.

"We-uns is a bamboozled passel o' idiots!" said Old Rocky, with an expression of self-contempt and disgust, mingled with the anxiety and perplexity that was plainly marked on his face. "Though hit c'u'dn't be 'spected thet we'd make up fer a hour's stompede lope, which ther condemned kiote hed ahead o' us."

"Howsomever, come ter rumerate, I opine thet ther camp, whar ther Chap'rell Wolf hev bin layin' 'roun' in o' late, can't be fur off. I reckon we-uns better glide up-river a piece, an' keep our peepers busy borin' inter ther mesquites t'other side, then mebbe so we kin pick up pints thet'll inclernate towards a resky."

"Boyees, this hyer ole raw-hide ripper ain't goin' ter g'n up beat by pepper-chawers—not much! An', pard Bill, I reckon yer feels somethin' similar?"

"Kerrect, Ole Rock!" agreed Bill. "Thar's hefty biz ahead; but we'll hev Goldie Gaines out o' thet yellor hellyun's clutches, er leave our carkisses in ther chap'rells o' Mex'. I opine es yer ses, thet Juan Peres ain't goin' much further. Thet thar hole what Cortina an' his cut-throats hev bin layin' off in can't be fur off, an' we-uns 'll find hit, dead sure."

"Come on, boyees, up-river! We'll do es Ole Rock ses; skute through ther mesquites, an' keep a sharp lookout on t'other side fer p'int. Hit's kinder cloudy now, Cap. Gaines, an' a reg'lar norther o' hellishness hev bin a roarin' all night, so brash an' cuttin' thet hits bin calkerlated ter wilt a white human, ef he hes any heart, inter his butes; but I'gins ter feel in my bones thet thar's bin 'bout es much dev'lishness shoved onter ther leetle gal, es ther good Lord'll allow. Hit's time fer a change, though things 'pears jub'ous."

"Gentlemen," burst out Percy, earnestly; "I am truly thankful for your encouraging words, and I admit that there seems to be but little hope of saving poor Goldie from a terrible fate; but I have crossed the ocean in search of this waif of the Gulf, and I swear that I will cross the river before us, as soon as the shades of night favor me, and I'll make the attempt to rescue her, if my life pays the forfeit!"

"I am a stranger in a strange land, wounded, and weakened by privation and fatigue; but I am still ready and anxious to do or die."

"God bless you!" said the old captain. "Our interests are now the same, and our love is bent upon one object. We will save Goldie!"

"God will not allow her to be cursed and polluted by such a dastardly fiend as Juan Peres."

"I'm going into Mexico for Goldie," said Little Lightning, "if I have to go alone. She will not live long if she remains a captive. Her heart will break. I know this, from what I saw of her while I was with her. She was in great suffering."

"Those bandits have no mercy, and I only wish I had a chance to rid the world of some more of them. Is it possible, Bill, for us to cross to-day?"

"Can't glide over ontil night, no sort o' ways, leetle pard," was the reply. "By glidin' up-river then, we-uns mought strike a place whar thar war a wash-out cuttin' down inter ther yearth, nigh ter Grandee water on both sides; an' I mought swim over, an' kinder 'vestigate things. But we-uns mought es we'll levant, an' keep a eye on Mex' dirt, er we mought miss somethin' thet'll count in ther game."

"Come, folkses; skute air ther word!"

Agreeably to the wishes of the scouts, all mounted, and proceeded slowly among the mesquites, each viewing the opposite bank of the river with eager interest and anxiety.

Thus they went for a mile or two, the river curving southward, and none speaking a word; when suddenly Bill Mann and Old Rocky drew rein simultaneously, the former crying out:

"Keep shady, boyees, an' jump ter dirt! Don't show a ha'r, fer thar's sharp eyes t'other side ther drink. I reckon we-uns hev 'roved whar we'll hev a show ter l'arn somethin' 'gards Juan Peres an' his oufit."

"Lariat yer nags ter ther mesquites! Bill, see ef yer can't friz yer peepers onter somethin' in ther way o' 'sign.'"

The young scout secured his horse, allowing considerable slack to the lariat, and slipping the bridle, attached the same to his saddle-horn.

"I hev see'd somethin' ormighty sing'lar," he remarked, "an' rather pecul'ar on t'other side."

Captain Gaines, Gerald, and Percy now dismounted eagerly, their faces flushed with excitement; for, by the words and manner of the scouts, they knew that some discovery had been made, bearing upon the object they had in view.

A glance at the scouts decided them in regard to the disposition of their horses; and they also secured their animals, allowing them to graze.

Old Rocky and Bill crawled upon their hands and knees through the clumps which branched up thick from the ground, until they were near the edge of the dizzy height; and had, beneath them, an unobstructed view of the great chasm.

A strange sight met their view.

Just across from their lookout was the mammoth "wash-out," Cortina's camp; but a huge mass of mesquites had been cut by the bandits, and piled across its mouth, to screen the camp from view.

The Mexican bank of the river, at this point, was some fifty-feet higher than the Texan, consequently the bed of the immense "wash-out" was hidden.

The leaves on these mesquites were dead, and withered to a reddish hue, which fact drew the attention of the scouts, and decided them at once in regard to the purpose for which the brush had been placed there.

In the middle of the wash-out was a deep, narrow fissure, which, far down from the bed, poured a tiny stream into the Rio Grande, the same being nearly a hundred feet from the surface of the river, which caused the little stream to be nothing more than spray ere it reached it.

But the central part of the view, where the little stream poured from the dark and narrow fissure, was stranger still, and, to the observers, was an unaccountable sight.

This was the figure of a man in a sitting posture, his limbs hanging over the awful height, the water pouring over it, giving them slight motion. His hands were pressed against either

wall of the fissure, while he seemed with great difficulty to maintain his position.

Even at that distance our friends had no doubt in regard to his being a bandit; and, judging from the fact that they believed the "wash-out" to be the lurking-place of Cortina, previous to his raid on Brownsville, they felt assured of it.

Had they been present at the time of the escape of Sharp Eye, the Seminole, they would have known that one of the guards who had dropped the lariat attached to the black steed, and who had been shot by Cortina, had fallen from his horse into the narrow fissure.

The wound that the bandit had received was not fatal at the time; but, weak from the loss of blood, he had crawled along the dark, winding passage, from which there was no escape, to its mouth, where, having sufficient reason left to realize his fearful peril, he had braced himself with all his strength to avoid slipping off the appalling height on the sliny clay, and into the Rio Grande and death-land.

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dorgs!" burst from the lips of Old Rocky, in the utmost astonishment.

"Pard Bill, what in thunderation's the meanin' o' that? Thar's a Greaser, right on ther edge o' kingdom come, but keepin' a tight grip on this hyer big ball o' dirt, though I sh'd opine hit war a grip he c'dn't pend on long. Hit must be sorter slippery thar, an' he's luerble ter slide off inter ther Grandee on ther whiz."

"A sorter cool bath, afore he starts inter ther long fandang' on hot coals, I reckon. I'd rather locate in a hole, an' chaw bugs fer grub ther remainder o' my lingerin' on this byer yearth, than be in his fix for five minnits."

"Hit makes my ha'r crawl like scorched snakes ter gaze et ther miser'ble cuss, even ef he air a condemned pepper-chawer. What in ther name o' Crockett does yer make out o' his posish', pard Bill?"

"Shove somethin' a leetle more easy, pard," replied the young scout. "I'm dead ag'in' a stump, es 'gards thet Greaser; dog-gone me ef I ain't! Hit 'pears though he'd fell down inter thet narrer crack from 'bove, whar I opine ther camp o' ther helyuns air, an' hev hurted hisself bad."

"I don't reckon thar's any way outen thet hole, fer prob'ly hit gits narrer an' narrer, es yer goes up from ther Grandee."

"Good Heavens, what an awful position that man is in!" exclaimed Captain Gaines, as he crawled up. "It makes one's blood chill to look at him."

"Great Cesar!" burst from the Englishman. "Why does he not crawl back?"

"I'm a-bettin' my nag ag'in' a jack-rabbit he's taken his las' crawl," said Old Rocky, squirting a stream of tobacco-juice out over the fearful height, with nervous action.

"He must be wounded, or he would draw back," put in Little Lightning.

"Thet's 'bout ther size o' hit, leetle pard," agreed the old scout. "He's es weak es a ole hen wi' chain-lightnin' pip. Jerusalem! Boyees, he's a-loosenin' his grip, dead sure! Jist gaze et ther miser'ble cuss!"

The old scout was right, for the limbs of the doomed bandit suddenly straightened upward and out from the flowing stream at an angle of forty-five degrees, his body sunk backward, he slid from his position and shot down the awful height with lightning-like velocity into the swift-flowing waters far below, disappearing from human view forever!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SEVEN SEMINOLES.

DEEP sighs of relief were heaved as the Greaser disappeared beneath the waters of the Rio Grande, for it had been agonizing in the extreme to look at the miserable man in the awful position in which they discovered him, although they were confident that he was one of Cortina's followers.

The bandit chief had chosen a point for his camp which he well knew would not be discovered from the Texan bank, except by accident, as there was an impenetrable chaparral between the river and the Government road, and but a narrow belt of scattering mesquites between this and the steep bank.

This last, however, was not liable to be traversed by Texans.

No sooner had the Greaser shot into the river than Old Rocky sprung to his feet, exclaiming:

"Thet part o' ther p'ogramme air over, an' now I shell hump myself towards ther chap'rell, on higher ground, climb a tree an' take a look over thet brush-heap ter t'other side."

"I wish't I hed a 'long-eye,' es ther Injuns calls a spy-glass; but my peepers air purty peart till yit, an' I reckon I kin make out what's goin' on over ther drink. Lay right hyer, boyees, an' take a rest. Ef yer kin fool yerselves inter a leetle see-ester, any ou yer, drap right inter one, fer yer needs sleep."

"Yer won't be woth shucks ter-night, Cap—you an' leetle pard an' Stan'-ther-Press—ef yer don't snatch a snooze. So long!"

The old scout disappeared among the mesquites, going inland from the river.

"Thet's good advice Ole Rock shoves out,

boyees," said Bill. "Try an' gi'n yerselves a leetle sleep, fer yer needs hit bad, an' yer'll be ther gainers by hit. Yer'll need all ther vim an' 'sand' yer kin muster ter ther front ter-night, er I'm bad fooled."

"I couldn't sleep, friend Bill; my mind is so tortured by anxiety in regard to poor Goldie," said Captain Gaines.

"She won't be no better off fer thet," was the reply. "Throw hit off fer her sake. Her life 'pends on all on us bein' chuck full o' fire an' fight, which yer won't be ef yer doesn't sleep."

All now reclined upon the sward. The sun was intensely hot, the air filled with quivering, hazy heat, but all were in the shade of the mesquites.

Thus they remained for some time in silence, Bill Mann lying flat and gazing over the river; his eyes as bright and piercing as though he had passed the night in sleep.

At length the young scout turned his head, attracted by hard breathing, and saw that all were asleep. Bill gave a low ejaculation of satisfaction and then examined his carbine and revolvers.

Soon Old Rocky stole silently to his side, and threw himself at full length on the sward; with a look of pleasure on his face, when he discovered that the remainder of the party had succumbed to fatigue and privation, and were sleeping.

"Pard Bill," said the old scout, in a satisfied tone; "hit's jist es we-uns s'posed. Ther bell-yuns' camp air over yunder, but thar's only a thin sprinklin' o' Greasers thar. I'm opinin' thet ther heft o' them skuted Resaca-way, arter ther scrimmage, all chuck full o' prussic acid an' hyderphobic, an' sp'ilin' fer satisfac' an' white bleed. They'll wipe out all ther cotton camps, sure es shootin'!"

"Howsomever, I reckon Ole Rip'll skute arter 'em, when ther boyees gits a leetle fresh breathe. Yaas, ther camp air dead across from this, in ther big "wash-out." Thar's some considerable nags thar; but, es I said, a thin sprinklin' o' humans."

"Thar's a shelter, made o' Mex' blankets, which I c'dn't gaze inter; but I'm a gamblin' thet ther cuss, Juan Peres hev gut Goldie inter hit. Ther p'ogramme'll be ter glide 'cros', soon es hit gits sorter darkish, et Reonosa, an' make our critters skip lively fer ther mesquites; knifin' er ropin' every cussed yaller-belly we runs ag'in'."

"We'll then flicker up-river towards ther wash-out, an' scout 'roun' ter find out a soft place ter make a break fer. They won't 'spect we-uns 'd dare cross ther drink arter ther leetle gal; an' thar's whar we'll hev ther 'vantage."

"We'll hev ter gi'n 'em chain-lightnin', right on ther jump, snake Goldie outen ther clutches, an' then flicker like a prairie-fire back ter ther ford. We-uns'll hev ter run slim chances, but ther leetle gal hev gut ter be saved, ef ther ole man flops over an' makes a die o' hit, wi' Greaser lead in ther bestest part o' his 'natermy."

"Thet's jist ther way ther buck air runnin', Pard Bill. I never hed my ole heart so filled up wi' sorer afore. Hit's 'nough ter make a bull alligator crawl ashore, draw in his tail, an' cry his eyes out, ter rumernate on ther misery thet condemned kiote Juan Peres hev shoved onter decent white folkses, an' ther persish' o' thet leetle gal!"

"Air yer listenin'? Dang my ole heart ef I hain't talked him ter sleep! Wa al, hit's a good thing—sleep air—an' I wouldn't mind taking a see-ester myself, but thar doesn't 'pear ter be a openin' fer hit; so, I reckon I'll take a big chaw o' 'nigger-head' instid, an' then arterward I'll git out my ole corn-cob pipe, an' hev a suck et thet."

Old Rocky was right. Bill Mann no sooner saw that the old scout was again on hand, and heard him assert that the bandit camp was, as they had inferred, directly across the river, than he suddenly collapsed, and fell into a peaceful slumber.

To portray the prostration, grief, and despair of poor Goldie Gaines, when she recovered her senses and found herself once more in the arms of the merciless fiend, Juan Peres, would be impossible; and when she recalled the fact—which she was presently able to do—that her brave, and darling little brother, had been shot from his horse while defending her from the bandits, these barrowing feelings increased ten-fold.

Her eyes became fixed upward upon the repulsive face of her captor, she doubting, and with good reason, that the mercy of God would allow such an inhuman monster as Juan Peres long to triumph over helpless innocence, and to trample virtue in the dust beneath his polluting heel. But her countenance was expressionless, and she remained seemingly devoid of reason, her brain having already endured so much that nothing which could now happen could possibly increase her anguish.

The sudden and overwhelming consciousness that Gerald was dead—shot by the yellow miscreants while defending her, and striving, like the hero that he was, to prevent her from being recaptured—this horrible fact, flashing upon her mind, had been the finishing stroke.

It rendered her for the time indifferent to her

surroundings of her perilous position. Her only and faintly defined thought, and wish, and prayer was that she might be able to seek some quiet, lonely spot and there lay down and die—that she might seek in Heaven, of which she had so often dreamed, the justice, and peace, and happiness that were denied her on earth.

And feeling thus she closed her eyes to avoid looking upon the face of Juan Peres, who seemed like some fiend bearing her in hot haste to Hades.

The bandit lieutenant at times gazed down upon the angelic face that rested upon his arm, upon the wealth of golden hair now flying in the wind of their speed over his shoulder; gazed in floating exultation, seeing nothing now to come between him and his plans.

He had, in no way, permitted his own project—the capture of Goldie Gaines—to interfere with his duty to the chief, and he now counted upon the assistance of Cortina, although at times he was a little suspicious, fearing that the great beauty of his captive would cause the bandit chief to covet her and resolve to possess her for himself.

Juan knew that Cortina never allowed anything to stand between him and his desires or caprices, even though he sacrificed a dozen lives, and he knew, also, that if his chief took a fancy to Goldie he would shoot him like a dog if he refused to deliver her up to him.

While these thoughts agitated Juan Peres not a little, he resolved to remove Goldie from the "wash-out" camp, to which he was bound, before Cortina should arrive from Matamoras, whither the latter had gone to collect recruits before the news of his disastrous defeat at Brownsville should become known beyond the Rio Grande.

He knew that Cortina intended to sweep the Resaca camps, in revenge for the loss of so many of his followers, and then to dash down the river and swim across, leaving his men to make their way to Reonosa ford, and from thence to the camp in the big "wash-out."

Any stragglers that might arrive in the mean time would be under his orders, and Peres resolved that as soon as he was rested, he would go to Comargo for a priest and have the girl legally in his power without delay. Then a bright and glorious future would be in store for him.

All this seemed easy of accomplishment to Juan Peres, especially after he swam across the rapid channel in the ford, and his horse clambered up the Mexique side, both he and his fair captive dripping with the waters of the Rio Grande.

Turning to the left, without entering the streets of the town, Juan Peres dashed into the chaparral of mesquite and nopal; there placing the young girl upon the horse on which she had been mounted when captured, and which had been led by one of the bandits.

The poor maiden sat the animal listlessly, a far-away look in her beautiful blue eyes, and on galloped the quartette, up the Rio Grande. It was then that they were observed by the scouts, the captain, Little Lightning, and Percy, from the Texas bank.

On their way, they met with a large number of the stragglers from Brownsville, who had been wounded, and who had crossed the river in advanced of Juan Peres; and they now all proceeded to the camp in the big "wash-out."

Here Goldie Gaines was placed in an excavation in the bank, at the back of the blanket awning which has been described—a cave-like chamber, covered with a carpet of serapes, and a couch of the same being her resting-place. A blanket was hung over the entrance; causing the young girl's prison to be as dark as a tomb.

But, before Juan Peres reached the "wash-out," he passed a thick *motte* of plain mesquites; and, from between the branches of the same, black piercing eyes shot murderous, vengeful glances, from out a framework of paint-daubs, at the bandit lieutenant—glances that meant revenge at any cost; that meant blood and terrible torture!

Seven bronzed warriors crouched there, but they sprung not from their covert.

The foe was too strong in numbers, but they could wait.

They were the six braves, who had dashed to the rescue of their chief, Sharp Eye, the Seminole, and that chief crouched with them in the *motte*, his lips curling away from his clinched white teeth, like those of an enraged panther, his face contorted with fury, and his eyes filled with a burning thirst for revenge!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SHARP EYE ON THE WAR-PATH.

THE day has passed, and a day of anxiety and dread apprehension it has been to our friends, who waited so patiently for its close. Even when asleep, they were groaning in anguish and horror at the scenes presented to their tortured minds in dreams.

The day has passed, and the blood-red rays of the sun, that shot upward from below the western horizon, had vanished; and the silvery god of night was now favoring those who had watched for his rising. They were now mak-

ing their way across the ford, and gaining covert among the mesquites to the westward of Reonosa.

Their horses have grazed to their content, rested and slept, and are now fresh, and eager to bound forward without any need of their masters urging them on. And on they go; the fact that many small parties of bandits have crossed the ford, some wounded and bandaged, would cause any Mexicans who might see our friends from a distance, to decide that they were some of Cortina's men, returning from their most disastrous raid.

The scouts took the lead, and kept near to the river bank; knowing nothing of the "wash-out," the entrance to the great chasm, in which is the bandit camp.

Thus on, past the point where Cortina secured the black steed to the mesquite; thus condemning it and its rider to a horrible death.

Still on, until past the open plain, where the horse of Sharp Eye was lassoed by the bandit chief; and thence into the mesquites, which stretch to the big "wash-out." Then they begin to proceed with caution; their horses dropping into a walk.

Soon all were brought to a halt by a horseman, who spurs his animal, a half-wild mustang, from a dense *motte* of mesquites, directly in the front of our friends. Then, half-whirling his steed, he faced them.

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dorgs!" Such was the involuntary exclamation of the old scout.

"Ef thar ain't a red human, I hopes ter be carved by a Pinte squaw, an' hev my head skinned by papposes!"

"Terrantalers o' Tophet!" burst from Bill Mann, equally astonished at the appearance of an Indian so far down country; and thus, singly and alone, confronting their party in so fearless a manner.

The scouts at once perceived that the red-man was a superb specimen of his people; strong as a bull, supple as a young buck, and with an eye like an eagle. His features, mien, and manner proved him far above the average of Indians, in nobleness of character, and in undaunted daring.

That he had but recently battled for his life, was also evident; for his arm was bound with bandages, which were stained and smeared with blood, his broad, naked breast was scratched, his leggins and moccasins were torn, and the three eagle-feathers, that were held in place by a fillet amid his tangled black hair, were broken and crushed.

His face was fresh painted for the war-path, and his eyes shot piercing glances at the party of whites, who saw at once that he had some important communication to make; that the war spirit, which blazed from his eyes, was not brought forward by any animosity toward themselves.

This supposition soon became a certainty, for the warrior clutched a long scalping-knife, jerked it from his belt, where it rested beside an army "six" and hurled the weapon downward in front of his horse, burying the blade to the hilt in the earth.

He then raised his right hand upward, turning the palm toward the whites; two tokens of peace on the prairies.

For a moment, he sat his prancing steed like a Centaur, with the air and mien of a king of the forest and plain—as indeed he was—then bounding forward, his form slid earthward, and back in an instant, while he regained his knife.

Thrusting the weapon into its scabbard, he burst out in a deep and powerful voice:

"Sharp Eye, the Seminole, would speak with the white men of Texas. When the soldiers of the great white chief at Washington were at war with my people in the Everglades, they fought like brave men; and our hunting-grounds, and the graves of our fathers were lost to us. But they did not steal our young squaws, to curse, and pollute them.

"Twelve moons have passed since Senola, the Star of the Seminoles, made glad the heart of Sharp Eye by her smiles. Her voice was like the song of birds, when the sun comes up from the big Salt Lake. Her step was like the prairie fawn. But the bad men of the chief, Cortina, camped near our village, and Senola was destroyed.

"Her eyes, that before looked upward at the sky, and into the face of Sharp Eye, sought the ground. Her song was hushed, and her step was like the wounded doe. She would not tell what snake had buried its fangs in her heart. Sharp Eye thought it was Cortina.

"Senola's cheek had been like the rose of the prairies, but it turned the color of the white rain that falls in the land of the Sioux. Her eyes shone in the night like the eyes of a panther, and she threw herself from the high bank of the Bravo. Senola was lost forever to Sharp Eye and her people. The blood of Seminole chiefs was in her veins, and she could not live when the finger of shame was pointed at her.

"Senola was the child of Wild-Cat, and my white brothers know he was a great chief.

"When Senola was gone to her fathers, Sharp Eye swore by the Good Spirit that he

would torture and kill the snake that had stung his squaw. He swore he would lead the Texasos to the camp of Cortina; but the yellow-skins, caught him on the trail, and took him to their chief. Sharp Eye escaped, but his hands were tied, his feet were bound under his horse, and Cortina lassoed his mustang, and tied Sharp Eye's horse on the bank of the Bravo, where he would soon fall down to his death.

"Before we reached the river, Cortina spoke of Senola, and said the snake, that stung the Star of the Seminoles, was named Juan Peres. Sharp Eye believed Cortina spoke true, for the yellow chief wanted his life for swearing he would lead the Texasos to his mountain camp.

"Sharp Eye was saved by his braves, as the mesquite and the bank were falling, when the death-song was on his lips. The Good spirit led the warriors of Sharp Eye on trail and saved his life, that he might torture the snake, Juan Peres.

"Sharp Eye is not a fool. He has seen the snake crawling to his hole but his braves are few, and the yellow-skins are many. Sharp Eye knows that Cortina has been on the war-path in Texas, and has lost many of his men. He comes not back with his braves, that have felt the bullets of the Texasos; but Juan Peres has galloped fast to his hole in the ground.

"Juan Peres came not alone. He brought a white squaw with hair like the gold that the Apaches bring from the mountains, that shines like the sun when the earth is dry, and the sky without clouds. She is more like the spirits that Sharp Eye sees in his sleep, than the people of the woods and plains. When Sharp Eye saw her, he thought of Senola. He swore by the Good Spirit, that the snake, Juan Peres, should not crush her, as he did the squaw of the Seminole chief, and he waited until the sun hid his face, and the moon went behind a cloud; saying to his brves, the squaw with the hair like the sunshine must go back to her people, and Juan Peres must die.

"Sharp Eyes is not a fool. Sharp Eyes' heart is big and warm to the squaw that Juan Peres would sting. He knows that the Texasos have come for her. Sharp Eyes knows Old Rocky. He is a great brave. His heart is big. His eyes are like the eagle's. He knows no fear.

"Sharp Eyes will lead the Texasos to the hole where the snake hides, but the snake belongs to the Seminoles. The Texasos can have the squaw with the hair that shines like the sun.

"Sharp Eyes, the Seminole, has spoken."

"An' dang my dorgs, cuss my cats, double me up, twist me, an' wring my bleed all out, ef yer hain't slung some o' ther most simon-pure stud-hoss sense I ever heerd chucked inter es much lingo afore since I war hatched!

"Shake, Sharp Eyes! Dang'd ef I know'd yer! Yer looks es though yer'd bin drag'd through the chap'rell feet fast by wile mustangs, from Grandee City ter Brown!

"We-uns is chuck full o' glad ter run ag'in' yer, an' git a smooth trail toward ther condemned pepper-chawin' back-sticker, Juan Peres. Ye're ornighly right, Sharp Eye! We're arter ther leetle gal, jist a-billin'; an' yer kin hev Juan Peres ter tortur' es fur es I'm consarned. Yer hes a perfick right ter do hit. I see'd Senola two year ago, an' she war es purty es a posy."

All now gathered around the Seminole chief, grasping his hand with friendly warmth.

"Heap little brave for war-path," was the remark of Sharp Eye, as he looked at Gerald.

"He killed four yaller kiotes las' night, small es he air!" explained Old Rocky.

The Seminole grasped Little Lightning's hand again, and shook it warmly; wonder and admiration expressed by a deep:

"Waugh!"

"Chief," said Captain Gaines, "may the Good Spirit bless you for your sympathy, and for the assistance you bring us. Believe me, I can feel for you in the great wrong you have suffered. You have a right to avenge the injuries and death of the Star of the Seminoles."

"And, permit me to say," said Percy, "that I am proud to clasp your hand. I am conversant with the history of your people, and am a great admirer of Osceola, who was so basely betrayed and sacrificed—an act that all good and brave white men must deplore, whether American or English."

"Put yer paw right thar, my red friend," said Bill Mann, enthusiastically. "I knows yer by repertashe, an' thet ye're es squar' an' white a red es ever wove moccasins. Hit's thunderin' lucky for we-uns we run ag'in' yer!"

Thus the Texasos greeted Sharp Eye; their words spoken in a hurried manner, that betrayed their eagerness to proceed. This was not lost on the Indian, who, as Bill ceased speaking, gave a snake-like hiss; then, out from the thick *motte* dashed six mustangs, snorting at lash of quirt. Seated upon them were as many war-painted Seminole braves, all equipped for fierce fight.

Jerking their animals to a halt in line, and near the agreeably surprised whites; each warrior armed with a Colt's army "six," a carbine, and a long scalping-knife, was a formidable enemy to encounter. All were strong, sinewy,

and supple as panthers, and their black eyes gazed fiercely at the whites, wonderingly at Little Lightning and Percy; whose bandaged heads proved them to have been but recently in deadly fight.

"The war-path is open. The war-cry nestles on the tongues of Sharp Eye and his braves. Come! Let my white brothers follow. We will hunt the snake in his hole."

Whirling his horse about, the Seminole chief led on, his warriors riding singly in his rear, the Texans following in the same order; winding in a serpentine course, through the mesquites, and walking their horses cautiously toward the little gully, that led down into the water-excavated chasm, in which was the camp of Cortina, the Scourge of the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE RESCUE.

JUAN PERES placed a guard of two bandits at the blanket awning, and had food conveyed to Goldie Gaines in her cave-like prison; but the poor girl slept the sleep of utter prostration, a sleep that was trance-like.

The bandit lieutenant had his hands full, in getting his lawless, demoralized men into something like an approach to order, many of them being severely wounded.

All of them were ordered to form themselves into messes of eight men each, and to establish themselves along the side of the "wash-out," and close up to the east wall of the huge chasm.

Juan Peres wished to have the camp in order, as Cortina would probably arrive on the following day; and he was somewhat perplexed and worried as to what disposition he should make, for the present, of his fair captive.

He had thought of removing her to the suburbs of Comargo; but, upon reflection, he well knew that Cortina would be informed of his having brought her to the camp, and then removed her before his chief had arrived. This would anger Cortina, and might be the occasion of a quarrel between them, which would certainly end in his death; for Juan knew that Cortina would shoot him, on the slightest evidence of disloyalty on his part. Especially was there this danger now, when the bandit leader was furious at the disastrous ending of the raid on Brownsville.

The only way out of it seemed to Peres, to force Goldie into an immediate marriage.

This, in her present state, would be easy to accomplish; and then Cortina could not in any way interfere with his plans.

This, he eventually decided to do; so, the time that our friends passed on the Texan side, awaiting nightfall, was spent by him in a gallop twenty miles up the river, where he engaged Father Benevedas to perform the marriage ceremony on the following day.

When at last the bandit lieutenant arrived back in camp, he was obliged, from fatigue and long privation, to throw himself upon a couch beneath the awning, and in a few moments was in a deep slumber.

He was still asleep when our white friends and their Seminole allies rode silently and cautiously down the gully, ready to hurl themselves on the unsuspecting Greasers.

Juan Peres had not the remotest idea, nor had any of the bandits, that the Texans would dare cross the river; much less that they could find their camp. For that matter, none supposed that they would leave Brownsville, after having gained the battle and dispersed Cortina's followers. Juan lay down, therefore, with the firm conviction that his plot, as he had first conceived it, would be carried out to the letter, making him in a little time a gentleman of rank and wealth, with a beautiful wife and vast estate in England.

But the bandit lieutenant had yet to learn that man proposes and God disposes.

The bright moon shone down into the chasm, its rays falling upon the single drowsy sentinel who guarded the mouth of the gully. He was seated upon the ground, the inevitable shuck cigarette between his lips, his carbine resting against his shoulder, and its butt on the ground.

The Greaser was totally unconscious of the presence of a man in his rear, who, with stealthy tread and bowie-knife clutched closely, approached half-bent, his muscles strained for a desperate bound.

It is none other than Old Rocky, his jaws working nervously at his quid of "nigger-head," and we may safely conjecture that "cuss my cats" is upon his tongue, ready to be articulated at the moment his mission is accomplished.

Slowly, with the greatest caution, the old scout lessens the distance between himself and his intended victim, until within a couple of yards; then he bounds forward, his left hand clasp about the Greaser's chin, pressing the head of the bandit against his breast. An instant he held it there, as in a vise; the next the deadly bowie flashed in the moonlight, and with a sickening sound, was plunged through flesh and bone into the bandit's breast.

Wildly the startled Mexican clutches at the merciless arms of his foe, a gurgling sound issuing from between his clinched teeth; then the torturing steel is jerked from his vitals, and an

arch of blood spurts out through the moonlight.

A look of deadly hate, mingled with horror and agony comes into the eyes of the bandit; his clutch upon the arms of Old Rocky weakens, and then his arms fall limp. A convulsive shudder racks the outlaw's frame, the death rattle sounds in his throat—his criminal career is at an end!

No outcry, no yell of agony followed, and the followers of Cortina, the Scourge, slept on as soundly as though their hands had never been bathed in innocent blood.

"Waugh!"

This ejaculation comes from the darkness of the deep and narrow gully, and is expressive of satisfaction and approbation.

It is in the unmistakable intonation of Sharp Eye, the Seminole.

The old scout hastens toward the point from which the sound proceeds, takes the bridle-rein of his horse from Bill Mann, and vaults into the saddle, at the same time drawing his revolvers, as he said in a low voice:

"Dang my great-gran'marm's black cat, boyees, ef we hev'n't gut ther deadwood on ther hull fit-out! Thar ain't another Greaser wi' his peepers open, in ther camp, I'll bet my nag ag'in' a kite on hit. Thar ain't no use usin' big shooters. Le's wade in wi' 'sixes.' Lead on, Sharp Eye, an' take yer persish."

"Ther fandang' air 'bout ter open wi' lively music, an' hit'll take speedy skippin' ter keep time. We'll hev Goldie, an' bu'st up ther snakes' nest besidea. Skute slow an easy. Git inter line an' sweep clean!"

In accordance with Old Rocky's suggestion, all now drew their revolvers, Captain Gaines unable to prevail upon Gerald to keep back, lending the youth his carbine.

All being ready, they descended into the mammoth wash-out, the horses in a slow walk, and formed in line; the Seminole kept next to the bank, the whites beyond toward the middle of the basin, and Old Rocky on the extreme left.

Our friends felt that the next few minutes would decide the fate of Goldie, and feared most of all that, at the first alarm, she would be murdered. Consequently they were in a most desperate condition, knowing not at what portion of the camp to look for the unfortunate maiden.

The Indians were now wrought up to a pitch of vengeful fury, the war-spirit of their people nerved them to desperate daring, and, with them, the main object was the capture of Juan Peres. All, however, were resolved that they would kill as many bandits as possible, provided the doing so did not interfere with the rescue of Goldie and the capture of the bandit lieutenant.

It was some distance from the mouth of the gully to the first of the sleeping forms, and, as the Seminoles were the leading spirits of the night, the manner of proceeding was left to them.

Sharp Eye said that he did not fight sleeping men, and should alarm the camp before charging them.

But a moment elapsed after forming the line, when the blood-curdling war-cry of the Seminoles rung through the vast chasm; at the same time the quirts of the Indians hissed through the air, and all bounded forward over the hard clay bed of the "wash-out."

Bandits sprung in terror from their blankets, so paralyzed with amazement and dread—the memory of their recent disastrous fight fresh in their minds—that they knew not which way to run or what to do, few having sense enough, in their half asleep condition, to grasp their weapons.

Then came the Texan yell, filling the Greasers with despair, and down upon them dashed the red and white invincibles, the rattling discharge of revolvers sending a hail of lead hurtling in among the leaderless outlaws, who fell on all sides. The camp resounded with shrieks of mortal agony, fierce yells, war-whoops and cries of terror, while the sharp crack of revolvers cut through the vocal pandemonium.

Before the daring line of white and red braves reached the end of the camp Juan Peres was up and out, striving desperately to form his men and stem the overwhelming waves of death.

No sooner was he discovered by Sharp Eye, than, with a yell that cut the air like a knife, he dashed at the head of his braves down upon the bandits whom Juan was endeavoring to form in line for defense.

At the same time Percy caught sight of the blanket awning, and, driving spurs, he dashed toward it, shooting down all who barred his way.

Percy reached the gay-colored shelter, grasped his carbine, and shot the two guards dead in their tracks, the bullets from their guns flying past his head, their terror and amazement marring their aim.

The next moment he was under the awning, and tearing down the blanket screen, he sprung into the darkness, crying out:

"Goldie! Goldie Gaines!"

An outcry of joy in silvery tones met his ear, and then a female form fell forward into his arms, and he heard the words but faintly:

"Oh, save me! Take me home! Take me to father and Gerald! I know you are not a Mexican bandit. On, save me!"

"If I had a thousand lives, my little cousin, I would sacrifice them all for you. You shall be saved, if human power can do it. But come quick, we are fighting fiercely. Can you walk?"

Without waiting for an answer, Percy caught Goldie in his arms, ran out of the cave-like chamber, and springing upon a pile of blankets he drew his horse alongside. He then climbed into the saddle with his fair burden, Goldie having fainted.

The young Englishman then drove spurs, and being observed by the Texans, they, with yells of relief and joy, galloped up to guard his retreat, their revolvers vomiting fire and lead as they dashed on.

At the same time, Sharp Eye clutched Juan Peres by the belt from behind, jerked the weapons from his captive, and laying the bandit lieutenant across his horse, held him fast and sped after the whites, followed by his braves.

The alarm, fight, rescue and capture occupied but a few moments, during which the bewildered and terrified bandits had been so startled and demoralized that they rushed here and there, hindering each other from securing arms with which to defend themselves. The consequence was that more than a score of their number lay dead and as many more wounded, while not one of the whites or their Indian allies were slain, although some of each were wounded.

The Greasers who did have sufficient presence of mind to defend themselves shot wild, from the intense excitement that prevailed, so the victory was comparatively an easy one.

Up the gully dashed the whites, bearing with them the angelic maiden who had suffered so much, and had been so near to a terrible fate, followed by the reds, with the miscreant, Juan Peres.

The face of Cortina's lieutenant was the hue of death, and his features were contorted with the most abject terror and dread; for he knew that his race was run, that retribution had at last overtaken him, that torture was his doom!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SEMINOLE'S VENGEANCE.

A WEEK has passed since the daring charge of our red and white friends into the mammoth "wash-out"—the Cortina camp.

At the head of the little gully, the two parties separated; each with friendly farewells, and a high appreciation of each other's bravery, and the well-deserved punishment they had given to the outlaws.

The whites galloped at full speed, across the Reonesca ford, and into Texas, without molestation, proceeding at once to Brownsville.

The Seminoles bounded around the head of the vast chasm, and then up the Rio Grande by unfrequented trails; Juan Peres in their midst, bound fast to a horse, his hat gone, and his face ghastly with terror. The little war-party was filled with exultation, and their black eyes glared at their captive with a hatred that could only be lessened by his death, and that in the most horrid form.

Even had one of their own tribe committed the crime of which they knew him to be guilty, he would have been stoned to death.

On they dashed, two braves having lariats attached to the neck of their captive's horse, the ends of the same being secured to their saddle-borns, and bending low as their animals sped beneath the limbs of the mesquites; Juan Peres getting the full benefit of the same, the long thorns tearing his clothing and scratching his face, until the blood ran in little streams from brow, and cheek, and neck.

On, through the night, they rode; then they camped in a desolate, isolated spot, in the dense chaparrals, where they were secure from discovery; feeding their animals with the nutritious mesquite-beans that hung in clusters from the trees.

Thus they had proceeded, on their way to their village, northwest from the Larado trail, and arrived with their captive, without having been observed by any Mexicans during the *jornada*.

Juan Peres was now a most pitiable object to look upon. His clothing hung in shreds from his form; his body, limbs and face were scratched and torn by thorns, and his black eyes glared like the orbs of an enraged panther.

The manner of travel, adopted by his Indian captors, had rendered him more hopeless of being rescued; indeed he had settled into a state of despair, bordering on insanity.

It is a week from the date of Juan's capture, and it is night time. The silvery moon lights up the way of the red avengers; and, as they near their little village of some dozen lodges, they lash their mustangs onward, their eyes filled with triumph, at having secured the destroyer of Senola, the Star of the self-banished branch of their tribe.

Their mustangs are flecked with foam, and many quirt-marks show plainly upon them; for they knew well that, if pursued and overtaken

by Cortina, they would be killed, to a man. Then, their old men, their squaws and papposes would be massacred; and the people that followed Wild-Cat from the Everglades of Florida would be blotted out from the earth forever!

They know that they must depart from Mexico within two suns, or all will be slain; and that possibly, the bandits may dash up the Bravo, to recover or avenge their lieutenant in the mean time. But they have sworn by the bones of Osceola that Senola shall be avenged.

As the lodges come into view, the wild, weird war-whoop of the Seminoles rings from their throats, upon the night, with exultant intonation; and out bound youths, and maidens, and squaws, with tottering old men, whose scars speak of brave deeds in the seven years' war in the Everglades.

Ten graves among the number stalk proudly; these, and those who approach, being all that remain of the warriors of Wild-Cat—the others being represented by scalps that hang from Apache belts and lodge-poles in the mountains of Mexico.

A wild yell of welcome bursts from old and young, as they perceive the captive; and the chief soon springs to the earth, in the midst of his people, saying:

"Sharp Eye has brought the snake that stung Senola, the Star of the Seminoles. Let my braves get ropes of horse-hair for the torture. The snake is Juan Peres, and not Cortina. Let the squaws pack the lodges. Let the mustangs and mules be driven in from the openings; for the Seminoles of Wild-Cat must leave Mexico before the sun is high in the home of the Good Spirit. My people will go to Texas before Cortina comes, with three hundred yellow-skins, to kill the avengers of Senola."

In a brief space of time the work of packing was completed, and the orders of Sharp Eye carried out to the letter.

The braves then began the preparations for the torture, procuring ropes of horse-hair which had never been in use; the stiff ends of the hair projecting from all points. The Indians, who had brought in the captive, immediately dismounted; their horses being taken in charge by lads, who were eager to be of service in the work that was to follow.

Juan Peres was then unbound from the horse he had ridden, and secured to a post in a standing position; his clothing being instantly torn from him by the infuriated squaws, who had looked upon Senola as a being far above any in the tribe, except Osola, the son, and Osolala, the other daughter of Wild-Cat.

Osola, a youth of eighteen, strode to a position opposite Juan Peres, and for a moment stood with folded arms, gazing into the face of the captive with a look that spoke his burning thirst for revenge. Then he took out his knife, bounded through the circle of howling squaws, and in two dexterous slashes, cut the ears from the head of the bandit; throwing them, with an expression of disgust, to the mongrel curs that snapped and snarled at the captive's feet.

A cry of mortal terror and intense agony came from the purple lips of Juan Peres, which caused the squaws to hoot and jeer, and the young girls and lads to prick his limbs and body with mesquite thorns; thus wringing other expressions of pain and cowardice from the tortured wretch.

A whoop from Sharp Eye, however, dispersed the mob of squaws and children, to a wide circle; when the chief and braves entered the same, with the torturing ropes of horse-hair. One of these was now knotted around each wrist and ankle, each being wound around and around the naked flesh of Juan Peres, and then secured to the ends of other ropes, which were coiled around the bandit's body, until his flesh was completely encompassed and hidden. The sharp ends of the horse-hair, in this way pricked into the flesh of the captive like ten thousand needles.

Then, at another order from Sharp Eye, a number of lads brought a quantity of the longest thorns of the mesquite and prickly-pear, which they thrust through the strands of the ropes, here and there; at the same time, a brave advanced, leading, with great difficulty, a rearing and prancing mustang, evidently but recently lassoed.

A cotton bandage was bound about the eyes of the animal, and Juan Peres was placed on his back; his ankles being secured beneath the body of the animal. A strong sapling was then placed at his shoulders, and his arms bound fast to the same, from wrist to wrist; thus forcing him into a cruciform position.

The ends of two lariats were tied together, making some eighty feet in length, and an end of this was knotted around the neck of the horse. The animal was then led to a clear, level space between the village and the perpendicular banks of the Rio Grande, a rifle shot to the north.

An iron picket-pin, with swivel-head and ring, was driven into the earth, and the outer end of the long rope was attached to the ring; then the blind was removed from the eyes of the wild mustang, as a chorus of yells and howls shot out from the throats of bucks and squaws, youths and maidens, causing the star-

bled animal to bound into the air and spring sideways, endeavoring to rid itself of its shrieking, agonized burden.

This was only for a few moments. Then the mad mustang sprung, in a bounding gallop, over the ground, the cries of Juan Peres filling the night air; while Indian lads, with yell and lash, urged on the frantic steed.

As has been mentioned, the bank of the Rio Grande was but a rifle-shot from the Seminole village, and a level open extended from the lodges to the verge of the great chasm, it being three hundred feet down to the water. It was at this point that the deceived and wronged Senola, one morning just as the sun arose, had stood and waved her hand in farewell, and then sprung from the fearful height.

Ever since her spirit was believed by her people to hover around the spot where she had stood for the last time in life, and to fly through the tremendous chasm, that seemed to have been formed by the gods in an attempt to divide the globe in twain.

There the Seminoles believed that the spirit of the injured girl would be forced to hover, until her wrong should be avenged.

Under the directions of Sharp Eye, all the possessions of his people were now packed upon mules, the horses were driven in, and all made ready to depart for Texas. When this had been done the mad mustang was again blinded; the doomed man, still shrieking, but more faintly, knowing that death was near, but yet shrinking, in spite of the fearful agonies that were his, from the dread mystery which his guilty soul was doomed soon to solve.

No pity, no mercy was to be seen in the paint-daubed faces around him. Just the opposite, for the features of braves and chief were stamped with the most intense exultation.

The horse being blinded, the rope was detached from its neck and the animal pointed toward the awful chasm of the Rio Grande—pointed for the perpendicular bank, at the base of which, nearly three hundred feet below, flowed the waters of the Bravo.

The frenzied mustang trembled, as well as did the doomed man bound to its back.

The horse was now loose, the warriors of Sharp Eye sitting their animals in a crescent curve in its rear. They then shot out a terrific yell and lashed their steeds forward after the frightened mustang; squaws, youths, maidens and children, with vengeful whoops, and hurling stones with all their strength at the doomed man and mustang, that, with far-reaching bound and snort, sped toward the awful chasm—toward death.

Fast flew the stones, the air was filled with whoops and yells for a brief minute more; then came a fearful shriek, the despairing cry of a lost soul, as Juan Peres, in his coils of torturing rope, his arms bound to the section of sapling, outstretched to the utmost, neared the brink of that dizzy height.

A moment more and the snorting steed bounded afar out, and man and mustang shot downward with lightning-like velocity, and disappeared beneath the waters forever; a cloud of spattering, high-thrown spray, for an instant only, marking the spot where they struck.

A wild whoop rung up and down the tremendous chasm of the Rio Grande. Senola, the Star of the Seminoles, was avenged—terribly avenged!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A NEARER AND A DEARER.

"Cuss my cats an' dang my dogs, pard Bill! I don't reckon I keer ter glide in any nigher. Thar 'pears ter be a leetle too hefty a 'mount o' slam-up civerlize 'roun' ther ranch fer Ole Rock. Greasy buck kin breeches an' a woolen shirt ain't jist ther togs ter sashay 'roun' 'mong female wimmin folkses all kivered w' silk, satin an' folderol jim-cracks.

"Le's slide offen our critters, squat onder ther grass, an' take a fresh chaw o' 'nigger-head,' an' rumernate on ther persish o' things ginerly. I swan ter cristy, I'd like ter git a close gaze et Goldie, an' ter shake ther paws o' ther Cap an' Leetle Lightnin', an' thet squar' an' white Englisher; but thar seems ter be too many 'ristocratic humans sprinkled 'bout ther ranch."

"I doesn't make no 'jection ter squattin' fer a leetle while, Ole Rock; but I didn't come clean from ther Grandee ter gaze et Goldie a gun-shot off. But dog-gone my gizzard ef ther ain't a hefty sprinklin' o' ban'-box folkses 'roun' thar, dead sure."

"I reckon Stan'-ther-Press must ha' brung a ship-load over from English s'ile; an' if they raises humans o' his sort, Texas 'll welcome 'em with a hearty shake, givin' 'em a dang'd sight better beef ter chaw then they gits in Lunnun—though they does say hit's bigger'n Galveston, Austin, Houston, an' San Antonio, all chucked together."

"Dang'd ef I b'lieves thet, pard Bill. I've beard Joe Booth asserwate thet yer c'u'd sling England down onder one o' our perrarers, an' ther bufflers 'u'd swaller an' stomp hit 'roun' in ther course o' a moon, so nobuddy 'u'd know hit had ever bin thar. I've struck a blue streak gait on my critter, startin' et P'int Is'bel, an' fotechin' up on ther Canadian in ther Pan

Handle without my nag trompin' any 'ceptin' Texas dirt. Reckon I'll take a suck now et my ole corn-cob."

The speakers, whom the reader will at once recognize, had halted beneath the branches of a *motte* of live-oaks, sprung from their horses, and thrown themselves upon the sward, in the cool shade.

Four years have passed since the thrilling events occurred, in which Old Rocky and Bill Mann took such an active part, yet neither of them seemed to have changed in the least.

The cruel Civil War is over. The invasion of Mexico by Maximilian has been the means of creating Cortina, the Scourge of the Rio Grande, a general in the Mexican army; and many strange changes have occurred, which it is not necessary to mention here.

But our narrative would be far from complete did we not reveal to the reader some of the brighter side of the life of Goldie Gaines; her father, brother, and Percy, the brave, honorable, and self-sacrificing Englishman, and the scenes and incidents in this our last chapter, will suffice to show that Goldie, and her devoted friends, who risked their lives to save her from a terrible fate, did at last realize that there was a silver lining to the black cloud, which, at one time, had so darkened their lives as to cause them to doubt if there was any justice or humanity in the world.

As the words of the two scouts intimate, they had halted within view of a ranch, around which promenade, beneath the scattering oaks, the green foliage of which glittered bright in the rays of the Southern sun, numerous gayly-attired ladies and gentlemen, gathering the bright and fragrant flowers that bedecked the sward of the park-like grounds.

It was a large and roomy mansion, with a wide veranda along its front, and at each end; while in the rear were neat cottages for the servants.

At the time that Bill Mann and Old Rocky dismounted, a little distance from the ranch, a young man and a maiden were walking, arm in arm, back and forth on the veranda. The former was handsome, graceful, and with a splendid physique; in short, one who would anywhere attract attention.

The maiden was of fair complexion, with laughing blue eyes, and a wealth of wavy, golden hair, that hung, girl-like, in rich abandon, confined merely by some tiny flowery vines, coiled artistically in its meshes.

These were Stanley and Grace Percy—the latter known to us as "Goldie Gaines"—and the tell-tale glances, the flushed cheeks, the heavenly happiness, that neither of them can hide, show plainly that they are lovers.

This fact calls for an explanation.

When Goldie was rescued, she was taken first to Brownsville, thence to her home near Oakville—where we now find her—Percy accompanying the party.

The clothing and jewelry which she wore when, a little child, she was found in the boat, were produced by Captain Gaines; and the crest and initials engraved upon the latter proved Goldie to be the lost heiress, even had not her wonderful resemblance to the picture of her mother settled that fact previously.

This being clearly established, Percy was rejoiced beyond measure; and, his bravery, devotion, and self-sacrifice becoming known, it is not strange that it was appreciated by the fair girl, and that she soon grew to love him.

So infatuated did Percy become with his cousin, so much did he respect Captain Gaines, that he resolved to return to England, draw all the ready money that was invested, and return as quickly as was possible to deliver it over to Grace. This he desired to do first, in order that she might be able to relieve the straitened circumstances, in which the war and a protracted drought had placed Captain Gaines.

Percy carried out his plan, and made several voyages, to and from England and the mouth of the Rio Grande; and, on his last visit previous to our present introduction to them, Goldie to become his wife as soon as peace should be declared between the North and South.

And this is their wedding-day. All the gentry of the surrounding country are present; Old Rocky and Bill Mann having been sent for, as well as Colonel John Ford and Captain Donaldson.

A long table is spread, with the wedding-feast, beneath the oaks; and a score of negroes, in spotless white aprons, fly hither and thither, at the orders of the inevitable old "Auntie," in her gay-colored turban.

Captain Gaines bustles about nervously, and Little Lightning, now a young man of nineteen, and a representative Texan, dashes, as we inspect the scene, from the stables, mounted upon a *pinto*, or paint pony, graceful as a fawn, and full of fire and vim.

On beneath the oaks, Gerald dashed, for he had observed the two scouts; and soon after, the trio ride up to the front of the house, dismount, secure their horses, and advance to the veranda.

Percy and Goldie hasten to welcome the scouts, and Captain Gaines also rushes forward to grasp the hands of the noted border heroes;

while many gayly-dressed ladies crowd around, eager for an introduction to those who have figured so conspicuously in Texas history. This was somewhat bewildering and embarrassing to them, and especially to Old Rocky, who afterward declared to Bill and Little Lightning his feelings on the occasion.

"Dang my ole heart!" he said; "ef yer may-n't double me up, an' ring ther bleed all outen my ole carkiss, ef I didn't swaller ther heftiest chaw o' 'nigger-head' I ever tore off a plug. Ther streaks o' blue lightnin' war skutin' through my 'natermy every which way, an' I seemed ter hev 'bout fourteen swarms o' bees in my years."

"I w'u'dn't go through sich a rig ag'in fer fourteen hundred an' forty hosses! I come nigh stampedin' on ther whiz, right through silks an' satins; an' I sh'u'd, dead sure, ef hit hedn't bin fer Goldie."

We will do no more, however, than allude to the events which followed.

Colonel Ford and Captain Donaldson took a prominent part in the festivities of the occasion. Goldie, or rather Grace Percy, refused to establish her right by law to the English estates; saying, that, as they had been held by Stanley Percy, and he was now her husband, their interests were identical, and everything should remain as it was.

It was not long, however, before Goldie prevailed upon to take a voyage to England, when much of the property was disposed of; Percy, on their return to Texas, erecting a fine mansion near that of Captain Gaines, to the great delight of the latter, who was never happy unless his darling was near him.

Old Rocky and Bill Mann at tim s paid visits to both the captain and "Goldie"—for so they still persisted in calling the Waif of the Gulf—and were always made welcome by those who never ceased to be grateful to them as their preservers.

But neither Captain Gaines, Goldie, Percy, nor Little Lightning cared to converse about the dread happenings of those two eventful nights on the Rio Grande, as the recalling of what they had then endured was torturing to them in the extreme.

The fate of Juan Peres was made known by Sharp Eye to Old Rocky in San Antonio, when the Seminole chief, with the remnant of his people, accepted a reservation from the Southern Confederacy.

Awful as was the bandit's end, all who heard of it agreed that it was richly merited.

After the fight at Brownsville, and our leading characters had galloped up the Rio Grande to the rescue of Goldie Gaines, the rangers under Colonel Ford, although almost prostrated from fatigue and privation, were forced to gallop to Resaca de la Palma; as the defeated bandits, filled with vengeful fury, dashed to that point and shot down the rancheros in their camps.

The infuriated rangers dashed in small parties through the chaparrals, and hanged every bandit they could capture.

But neither this nor the defeat at Brownsville daunted Cortina; for in less than thirty days after, the outlaw chief again invaded Texas with twice as many followers, leaving a trail of desolation from Reonosa to Laredo, and driving many thousands of cattle and horses into Mexico as part of his plunder.

As to his future, it is possible that we may corral, in narrative form, some of the many thrilling incidents connected with the grand raid of Juan N. Cortina, the Scourge of the Rio Grande, and Wolf of the Chaparral.

THE END.

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